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In the School of Christ

THE MEANING OF THE BEATITUDES FOR TODAY

Gordon Pratt Baker

TIDINGS

Materials for Christian Evangelism

1908 Grand Avenue

Nashville 5, Tennessee

IN THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

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To my daughter
CAROLE LYNN BAKER
who is an apt pupil
in the School of Christ

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Part 1

SCHOOLMASTER
TO ALL THE WORLD

CHAPTER 1

The Peerless Teacher

And he opened his mouth and taught them. . . .—Matthew 5:2

WHEN THE RICH Young Ruler approached Jesus with his question concerning eternal life, he addressed the Master as "Good Teacher." Whatever his intent, his use of the term was profoundly right.¹ For "no man ever spoke like this man" (John 7:46) either in the Gentile world or among the Hebrews.

I.

Solon, one of the famed Seven Wise Men of Greece, could save his nation from great social catastrophe; yet he must summarize his philosophy with the pessimistic statement that "No

¹ Some scholars feel that the young man was using sarcasm in an attempt to ridicule Jesus; but the intensity of his attitude as he reluctantly rejected Christ's primary condition for salvation, combined with the fact that "Jesus looking upon him loved him," leads the present writer to believe that he was sincere.

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mortal man is truly blessed; but all are wretched whom the sun looks down upon." Thales, ignoring the mythical beings so highly revered in his time, could crystallize the sense of relationships basic to philosophical speculation; yet he had nothing whatsoever to say about the condition and character of man's spirit, without which intellectual pursuits have no significance. Socrates could shatter deep-rooted beliefs in the ancient Olympian deities; yet he lacked both the insight and the power to direct men to the God of purity and justice whom they instinctively sought. Plato could conceive of the good, the beautiful, and the true as the great underlying principles of life; yet he saw God as belonging to a category higher than personality because God Himself is only an idea integrating the universe. Aristotle could direct the greatest attempt ever made in ancient times to assemble and interpret the whole body of human knowledge; yet, in doing so, he could understand God simply as "an eternal unmoved mover," influencing the world, not by participating in its affairs, but through the kind of indirect impact that a lovely picture makes upon the soul.

It is little wonder that men of the Gentile world wearied of searching for something real and vital and available for their lives. Even a cursory study of the times immediately before and immediately after the opening of the Christian Era reveals a long list of thinkers like Lucretius and Cato, who, forsaking the painful effort to discover meaning in life, despatched themselves in despair.

Contrary to the Greeks and the Romans, the Hebrews never speculated about God or His place in the world. Neither Israel's people nor her prophets ever regarded God as an abstract Idea, a First Cause, or a Prime Mover. Indeed, Israel enters history with the conviction that God is personal; that He is a dynamic Actor in the human drama; that He is a *living* God whose directing presence both confounds and comforts; and that He stands forever alert to guide, to guard, to admonish, to judge, to chasten, and to save His people. Thus, He may be known through what He does. Accordingly, history is simply the story of the mighty acts of God in relation to the welfare and destiny of His own.

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There seems to be little room in this belief for the pessimism which marked the thinking of the Gentile world. But, ironically, the very concept which promised the Hebrews their freedom ultimately shackled them.

Tradition maintained that God had revealed His perfect will in the law of Moses. But the law itself must be interpreted; and, across the years, hosts of experts arose to elaborate upon it with meticulous care. In time, their various commentaries came to be regarded as equally authoritative with the scriptures through which the divine revelation had come. As a consequence, there developed in Israel a long series of explanations, prohibitions, and prescriptions aimed at regulating virtually every area of life. In fact, these annotations became so numerous that it required a lifetime to learn them all; and it was the responsibility of the scribes—or scholars—to help the common people to apply them properly.

The effect of these detailed rules of conduct was the establishment of an ecclesiastical legalism characterized by hair-splitting and unreasoning obedience. More and more the formal code was identified as religion, and less and less significance was attributed to the concerns of the mind or the desires of the heart. For all practical purposes, "God was a celestial Bookkeeper, forever noting down and balancing up men's debit and credit accounts."²

Thus, the experts had relegated to the background the prophetic concepts that had brought Israel through the Wilderness and established her as a nation. The great deliverances were experiences of the past. The divine Saviour had become the divine Legislator. The Judge had replaced the Redeemer. No wonder the Pharisees could say to the Temple police: "This crowd, who do not know the law, are accursed!" (John 7:49.)

Nor were Israel's religious leaders speaking lightly at this point. Actually, in large measure, they were reflecting the feeling of the people themselves. Confused and conscience-stricken, many an individual in Palestine must have shared Paul's self-denunciat-

² Charles Whitney Gilkey, *Jesus and Our Generation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1925), pp. 31-32.

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ing lament, "I do not the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19). The law had become an intolerable yet irrevocable burden, as Peter later testified when he found it necessary to defend the conversion of the Gentiles before the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-11). To change it, to misinterpret it, or to violate it meant disaster. Always there was the law looming large in the background of life, portraying a jealous God whose insistence upon righteousness was unyielding.

That Greek concepts and Hebrew convictions had intermingled in Palestine only clouded the issue still further. The influence of Greek thought had already been felt in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament; and the Sadducees, affecting Greek culture, had kept alive the spiritual concerns of the Hellenists. In addition, popular travelling lecturers had so injected Greek philosophy and criticism into the mainstream of Hebrew life that, by the time of Paul, at least, it would have been most difficult to find a teacher whose thinking was untouched by Greek ideas.

The background against which Jesus taught was complex, indeed. Yet he brought to his time such a confident and constructive philosophy of life, so unique in its simplicity of expression, that "the common people heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37 KJV).

II.

A good teacher always begins where his pupils are and steadily lifts their sights. Jesus was a good teacher. Fully conversant with both the popular thought and the religious law of his day, he readily recognized the intellectual and spiritual state of those he met, just as a master painter can instantly distinguish the marks of genius or mediocrity in an aspiring young artist. So he tailored his teaching to individual need. Thus, his approach to the unlettered woman at the well in Samaria was radically different from his theological discussion with the learned Nicodemus in the famous midnight interview at Jerusalem. So, too, his conversations with Mary in Bethany varied widely from his talks with Zacchaeus at Jericho. Even when he addressed large crowds, there was such a personal note in his message that everyone present had no difficulty in applying its truth to himself.

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The secret of Jesus' ministry at this point lies in the fact that he understood the distinctiveness of personality. Socrates in Greece and the legalists in Palestine might insist that knowledge is synonymous with salvation, that to *know* what is right is to *do* what is right. But Jesus knew better than that. Plato and Alcibiades proved only too well that men may be given the same facts and the same philosophies only to end up at completely opposite poles of the spiritual life.

Man is more than a thinking machine just as he is more than a comfort-craving creature. He is a complex of emotions and concerns, of commitments and repudiations, of insights and prejudices. He is a bundle of memories and hopes. He is a combination of habits and impulses. In short, he is a "multiple self" whose character—to borrow a concept from Harry Emerson Fosdick—is like a ceaselessly flowing river always in the "perpetual process of becoming."³ His happiness—and, eventually, his salvation—lies in his finding a single, significant direction in life which he can follow without reservation or regret.

Very definitely, Jesus realized this. All his life he had made it a point to study the interests and stratagems of persons until he literally "knew all men" (John 2:25). Accordingly, he knew *why* they were bewildered, or belligerent, or frustrated, or frightened. So, too, he understood *how* the man on the street could feel that things often happened to him without his initiative or consent; that he was buffeted by circumstances over which he had no control; and that—to put it bluntly—he had been transformed in some inexplicable way from a person into an object.

No modern psychologist ever had more lucid insight into human nature or spoke more directly to the deeper needs of individuals than did Jesus. He was never diverted by the superficial, but went immediately to the heart of the matter, as in the case of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11 KJV). For him, facts and philosophies were always subordinate to principles and motives.

Here, in fact, was the crux of Jesus' teaching. "Guard your

³ Harry Emerson Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), p. 27.

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inner self," he declared again and again in one form or another, "for so you live and prosper" (Proverbs 4:23, Moffatt's translation). A man is not good merely because he keeps the code. Character is reflected in conduct, but it is vastly more than conduct. The part must never be substituted for the whole. External restraints cannot replace inner convictions and attitudes, and the law is simply a guideline for the practical expression of fundamental motives.

In presenting this concept, Jesus was basically training his hearers to think for themselves. He was convinced that a man can get his heart right toward God and his fellows, not by reciting a creed or applying a law, but by honestly appraising his own life in the light of the eternal purposes of God. So he personalized the spiritual life in a distinct and unique way by confronting individuals with the necessity of a first-hand experience of the divine attributes.

It is precisely here that Jesus' consistency as a teacher becomes most evident. Independent thought and personal experience cannot be systematized. And Jesus offered his followers no systematic theology. In broad strokes, he depicted the love of God. With a wide and comprehensive sweep, he disclosed the place of man in the divine scheme. But he left to each individual who heard him the application of his revelations to the specific circumstance in which that person found himself. Thus, he taught men to direct themselves from within.

Here was something different in religious instruction. No wonder "the crowds were astonished at his teaching" (Matthew 7:28). For he taught with the authority of spiritual and psychological insight rather than with the support of weighted arguments and quoted sources.

III.

But the note of authority was not the only element to center men's attention upon the sayings of Jesus. There was also a quality of contagious expectancy that led them to listen.

In the first place, Jesus expected his followers to practice what he was preaching. Because he spoke to basic human needs, he

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confidently looked for a definite response. Thus, long before the present age coined the term, he used the power of positive thinking to lead persons into life-changing decisions. He did this, not through the denunciations and warnings so characteristic of the scribes and the Pharisees, but by inspiring men to look at the possibilities for good available to them even in the midst of evil. Consequently, he made them aware of purpose in the face of confusion, of "permanence in the presence of peril."⁴

So he revealed to them their capacity to transcend themselves. Men can live by principles when they cannot live by laws. With a stroke, he had made all persons equal in opportunity.

It is precisely here that Jesus differed most sharply from the teachers of his day. He did not hold up ideals that could be realized only in some distant and uncontrollable future. Rather, he insisted that the rule of God must come to pass through the lives of men and women whose present decisions have eternal significance.

Here was a new note in Israel. The Master was clearly affirming that God needs *persons* to provide the conditions basic to the coming of the Kingdom.

This is not to say that Jesus sought to deliver the establishment of the Kingdom into human hands. Nothing could have been farther from his mind than such a usurpation of divine power, as his promise to the disciples indicates: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to *give* you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

But Jesus also knew that a gift loses its value unless it is properly placed. Whatever the grant, its worth is diminished or magnified by the insight and attitude of the recipient. That God possessed the power to superimpose the Kingdom if He chose Jesus had no doubt. That Jesus believed God would not bring it to pass through force is attested by his forsaking the use of miracles in his own ministry. Instead, he looked for it to come by means of the unfolding principles which he sought to instil in the thinking

⁴ Albert Edward Day, *Jesus and Human Personality* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1934), p. 80.

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of individuals. As these principles germinated, they would spread from heart to heart to change the concerns of men. Thus, they would provide the kind of character that would make the Kingdom inevitable.

In short, Jesus believed that the coming of the Kingdom depended upon a long process of natural growth which God must initiate and which man must nurture. Its beginnings might be small and seemingly insignificant; but, with the proper reception and concern upon the part of those to whom the Lord entrusted His transforming truths, the divine revelation would expand in society as it deepened in the individual's personality until its dynamic force quietly took eventual and complete control over life.

The kingdom of God [he once told his disciples] is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear (Mark 4:26-28).

Obviously, such a process is not external. The growth of the blade and the ear and the full grain depend in large measure upon the quality of the soil. Of good soil men can logically expect good fruit. Of consecrated souls they can eventually expect the Kingdom. So far as Jesus was concerned, it was as simple as that; and his calm, unwavering confidence in the unfailing processes of the divine-human encounter induced men to listen to him.

In the second place, Jesus expected his followers to measure up to the requirements of the higher life to which he called them. Like the prophets before him, he had no concept of a lethal struggle between the flesh and the spirit to throw in doubt the outcome of the individual's dedication to God. Rather, he was convinced that a person can consciously adopt "as his own purpose the purpose which is already inherent in his own nature."⁵

Here is one of the profoundest assumptions in all history. With-

⁵ John Macmurray, *The Clue to History* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939), p. 55.

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out denying the existence of evil, Jesus emphasized the freedom of human will. If man is morally responsible for wrong, he is also morally capable of embracing right. Thus, by virtue of his nature, implicated though he may be in a world that is marred by sin, man can nevertheless think the goodness of God if he desires to do so.

Once man does that, however, he becomes conscious of the intentions of God for his life; and, in the strength of that realization, he begins to understand the essence of his relationship to his Creator. So he comes to see—perhaps in a glass darkly, but nonetheless realistically—the end for which he was brought into being.

When that happens, man is no longer a nonentity in a world of nonentities. Instead, he is a person endowed with significance through the divine purpose involved in his creation. Moreover, since God's purpose must inevitably be achieved, he himself possesses eternal dimensions in the light of which he must press on to higher things. For once he has come to see himself both as he really is and as he will be when God's work in him is complete, he will readily yield himself to the magnificent compulsions of the Kingdom.

Apart from such a concept, Jesus' familiar words of assurance to the disciples immediately prior to Calvary would be pointless:

... he who believes in me will also do the works that I do;
and greater works than these will he do . . . (John 14:12).

That men should respond to such a penetrating and positive appraisal in a world of tangled authority was inevitable.

In the third place, Jesus expected his followers to receive power from on high as they pursued the course he proposed for their lives. Just as the growth of the grain is dependent upon the warm sun and the gentle rains, so the spiritual development of men is conditioned by the sure and advancing revelations of God. That these revelations would come in accordance with each individual's state of spiritual maturity Jesus had no doubt. This is the reason that he told his disciples:

I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear

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them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . . (John 16:12-13).

Here was something that men could understand. Just as quietly as infancy develops through the varying stages of life into maturity—always under the surveillance and active concern of parenthood—so the souls of men, through the progressive experiences of life, grow into their salvation under the watchful eyes of God. In effect, Jesus was saying that God assumes the burden of guiding His children into the affairs of eternal life.

At this point the Master was lifting up a psychological principle which his hearers probably could not analyze, but which they instinctively recognized as true. God guides His people into the fullness of life by taking them where they are and encouraging them to complement the divine personality in much the same way that a child's personality complements its parents.

The child learns to follow the parents' thinking through studied imitation paternally indorsed. Thus, he lays the foundation for his own intellectual maturity; and, when the time demands it, he advances upon his own to grasp wider fields of knowledge. Just so does man learn to follow God's thinking. Through studied imitation divinely encouraged, he establishes the bases of his spiritual maturity; and, when the times demand it, he presses on to more daring insights.

Nor is this as mysterious as it may sound. The God to whom the creation of man is the natural outreach of love would find it just as natural to establish ways of communicating with His people. In fact, without such communication, He could not be God. For there can be no God unless there are complementary personalities with whom He can share experiences and to whom He can trust His creative purpose. He can be a Supreme Power over cosmic powers. He can be an infallible Director of universal forces. But He cannot be God, in the elemental meaning of the name, until conscious creatures, endowed with the power of will, recognize Him and respond to Him.

Consequently, God assumes the initiative in communicating with His people. It was no accident that He spoke to Moses be-

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fore Moses spoke to Him. It was not by chance that He addressed a puzzled Samuel and a frightened Elijah before they were even aware of His presence. Rather, He deliberately sought out each one and counselled with him according to his need and circumstance.

It must be noted, however, that in none of these cases did God actually speak until the individual had devoted his mind to spiritual things. Moses must turn aside to see why a bush blazed in the wilderness. Samuel must go to his night's rest from witnessing Eli's ministrations at the high altar. Elijah must fly to the refuge of a cave before the wrath of an outraged paganism. In each instance, the individual concerned was reflecting on holy things when he heard God speak.

Thus, as Jesus implied again and again, it is evident that the divine communication depends upon the human receptivity. This is not to say that God *cannot* break through intellectual and spiritual barriers to inject His revelation into the mind and heart of man. Instead, it is to say that He *will* not do so. One does not share by forcibly imposing his will upon another. He shares only when there is a meeting of minds and purposes at the point of experience and insight. Accordingly, revelation requires a certain amount of expectation, preparation, and readiness on both sides.

Perhaps we might use a simple illustration from contemporary life to explain what we mean here.

One of the most amazing feats of our day is television. By means of this highly scientific device, a California scene can be pictured in a Maryland home in a matter of minutes as a person three thousand miles away addresses unseen listeners in the Old Line State. The transmission of both the picture and the message originates in a powerfully equipped studio which selects the subjects to be televised. But whether or not the transmission will ever be seen depends upon the willingness of the Maryland home to view the particular telecast and the range and clarity of its set.

Revelation is basically no different. It must begin with a God who is so concerned for His people that He wants to share His life with them. It must be completed by the willingness and the ability of individuals to accept what God would share.

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Our highest hope, Jesus would say, lies in the fact that, somewhere in the process of our thinking, the mind of God and the mind of man can meet. Just as a television set can be tuned to the channel we want to extract images and messages from the air, so our minds can be brought in tune with the mind of God to discover the truths we need for the living of these days.

There is no miracle involved here. Television operates successfully because it functions according to definite physical laws. Revelation is real because it works in harmony with intellectual and spiritual laws. That God actively participates in human affairs few will deny. That being so, it necessarily follows that men actively participate in divine affairs. Hence there is an area of life which God and men experience mutually.

For some individuals this area covers a wider and more significant range than it does for others. But all share it in greater or lesser degree, both with God and with their fellow men. Consequently, they cannot prevent the development, however limited it may be in particular cases, of a common store of knowledge. As this area of mutual experience expands, God's mind and man's mind draw closer together in their thinking.

To those who may protest the simplicity of this claim, we would point to the fact that there are many married couples whose union has been of such long standing that in any given situation each knows what is in the other's thought without a word passing between them. Surely, what is patently true of human beings is hardly less true of an omniscient God as He associates with His creatures. Such, at least, seems to have been the conviction of John when he wrote in his first epistle:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2 KJV).

This, too, was the conviction of the Schoolmaster to all the world.

CHAPTER 2

Out of the Depths

"... every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."—Matthew 13:52.

NO MAN ever probed more deeply into the basic meaning of life or disclosed his discoveries more simply than did Jesus. In fact, he unfolded seminal truth in such an easy and commonplace way that, even after twenty centuries, we do not realize how profound his revelations are.

Perhaps this is partially due to the fact that, unlike most teachers, Jesus did not present a system of ideas and doctrines to prove a thesis or to establish his authority. Instead, he taught as the occasion demanded and extracted from life itself the eternal answers which men need in order to live at their best. Thus, he made no attempt to defend his declarations with involved and skillful arguments, like a lawyer building a case—not even in the presence of jesting Pilate! Truth is self-evidencing and needs no defense.

But most of us are accustomed to sharpening our wits on the well-turned phrases of closely reasoned debate. No matter how

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fruitless the discussion, we feel that logical or concrete proof must be offered before we can accept as conclusive the dogmas which we are considering. As a consequence, coming to the teachings of Jesus totally unprepared for his unaffectedness, we often fail to see that they lift up, not rules designed to match immediate and passing issues, but fundamental insights which meet present situations because they stem from the eternal purposes of God. Here Jesus was on final ground, and here rests our hope for resolving the problems of the present age.

In lifting up these insights, Jesus applied them to five areas of stewardship which stand as urgently in need of interpretation today as they did when the Master first defined them.

I.

The first of these areas is the *stewardship of personality*.

As we have already seen, Jesus had no small concept of the dignity and purpose of man. Like the prophets before him, he could not forget that man came *from* God and therefore lives *through* God. Neither could he forget the distinctiveness of man's nature, establishing, as it did, a relationship to God that was manifestly more than that of creature to Creator. The very fact that man can "think God's thoughts after Him" points toward a closer kinship than mere creaturehood could possibly involve.

But such a kinship also carries high responsibility with it. Man is not an independent being turned loose in the world to effect his own wishes. Rather, his chief end is to reflect the righteousness of God; and his first obligation is to work out the divine will.

That his task is endless should be obvious. For truth leads on to deeper truth; and, with each new insight, man's area of accountability widens. Thus, as Alfred Bloom puts it, "Man is man because he has a mission."¹ This is to say that man is not an end in himself, that he has responsibilities to his Lord and to his fellows, and that he finds his true perspective only in the manner in which his relationship with God affects the lives of those around him. In short, man is God's earthly ambassador.

¹ "Human Rights in Israel's Thought," *Interpretation*, October 1954, p. 425.

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The teachings of Jesus can be rightly understood only in the light of this broader concept of personality. Throughout his lifetime, Jesus' ministry was person-centered, not individual-centered.

The individual is an isolated self. The person is a social self. The individual is concerned with what life means to *him*. The person is concerned with what *he* means to life. The individual sees his talents only in terms of potential self-advancement. The person thinks of his abilities in relation to God's total cause.

Jesus concentrated his efforts upon turning individuals into persons. Toward this end, he constantly stressed the need for making decisions affecting the welfare of others. No stronger emphasis was ever placed upon the necessity to accept spiritual responsibility than that which Jesus made in his initial pronouncement to the people of Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19) or in the description he gave his disciples of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46).

The will to decide is basic to all growth. Conviction must become expression if it is to transform both the self and the society with which the self accepts identity. Jesus knew that becoming a person depends upon the degree of self-identification with the problems and potentials of the group, and he declared that fact in no uncertain terms by his revolutionary interpretation of the brotherhood of man. Moreover, he demonstrated it beyond the shadow of a doubt when, in his own life, he made the decisions that matter.

But having thus stressed the social significance of personal choices, Jesus nevertheless insisted that man's free will can never lie beyond the influence of God's will. The source of human good is the nature of God Himself. It is through divine revelation that man knows what is good. It is through God that the moral law assumes significance. Consequently, while man may *defy* the will of God, he can never *avoid* the will of God. He can only work for its fulfillment or break himself upon it.

In obedience lies man's hope; and obedience, contrary to popular conception, is not will-lessly yielding to force or grudgingly submitting to authority. It is freely accepting the kind of discipline that establishes direction and the kind of guidance that releases

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concealed but creative energies. To fulfill this stewardship, said Jesus, requires not only self-control, but also self-surrender.

II.

The second area which Jesus interpreted anew is the *stewardship of truth*.

Perhaps the primary motivation in developing the discipline of decision, so far as Jesus was concerned, is the passion for truth. This is because truth is the one cohesive factor that relates persons to one another and to God by linking them with the deathless purpose of Creation.

In his revelation of truth, therefore, Jesus disclosed unerring insight into the eternal nature of life itself. For he knew that truth is not an abstract element, separate and apart from practical affairs. Truth permeates the fibres of the universe to hold it in line with a divine cause great enough to warrant all the sacrifices essential to sustain it.

Committed to the conviction that we do not "have a little day and cease to be," Jesus thus saw that the redemptive purpose of God's love leaps from heart to heart and from generation to generation to make life meaningful. Accordingly, he related every age to the ages, not by social and cultural factors, which change with man's increasing knowledge, but by spiritual forces, which use the changes around them to shape new and sacred designs. In doing so, he made it clear that every truth which man discovers becomes a new basis for the discovery of greater truths because it has stretched his capacity to understand.

So Jesus emancipated men from the tyranny of facts. Fact would seem to indicate the power of evil. Truth silhouettes it against the backdrop of an eternal cause. Socrates drinking the hemlock, Jeremiah assassinated in an alien land, irrefutably substantiate this.

Fact would seem to indicate, as Heracleitus declared, that "everything changes." Hence, there is no permanence in life. Truth reveals that all things change at the dictate of a changeless law.

Water turns into snow, ice, frost, fog, clouds—but always it

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remains H_2O . The experiences of life may vary, but always the elemental forces that comprise it remain.

The unity of truth is to be found, not in the method of experiencing it, or in the manner of expressing it, but in the formative power of its ultimate purpose—that is, the establishment of increasingly better relations between God and men through broadening revelation and deepening understanding.

Thus, truth must always be greater than the particular forms of its expression. Otherwise it is no more authentic than the changeable form. But the very fact of its greatness constitutes both a hope and a challenge to men.

"... you will know the truth," Jesus once said to those Jews who believed in him, "and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). Free from what? Free from the shackling fears of a demon-infested world, such as Columbus knew. Free from an earth-bound world, such as the Wright brothers knew. Free from a world of moral and spiritual chaos, such as we know. Truth leads on to truth until it brings us to the Author of truth.

Thus, truth is a living force, factually revealed, to be sure, and expansive in expression, but always matched to the potential of the human soul. As a result, it comes alive through personalities that dare to risk everything for the fulfillment of its purpose. Just as electric wires conduct a revolutionizing current without which they would be lifeless, so men become channels for a transforming truth without which the world is doomed.

In their commitment to eternal truth, declared Jesus, men find eternal life.

III.

The third area to which Jesus applied his incisive insights is the *stewardship of time*.

Because he believed in its eternal nature, Jesus did not divide life into a human and a divine plane. Instead, he related the continuity of history to the continuity of immortality. Consequently, he saw life as a working partnership with God.

Now, the measure of a good partner is the way in which he uses resources mutually important to the partnership. As we judge

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men's business acumen by the way they handle money, so, Jesus declared in effect, we can judge their spiritual abilities by the way they handle time. For just as money is the medium of material exchange, so time is the medium of spiritual exchange.

The value of money, as economic depressions have repeatedly proved, is found not in itself, but in what it makes operative. In like manner, the value of time is found, not in itself, but in the degree to which it enables truth-expressing ideals to function.

Thus, the same factors of integrity and investment prevail. How wise is the expenditure? What will it produce? What will it secure? What return may logically be expected from it? Edwin Arlington Robinson is intellectually kin to Jesus when he says, "Years are not life. Years are the shells of life, and empty shells when they contain only days and days and days."

Jesus never allowed people to waste his time. He made no effort to go after the Rich Young Ruler or even to argue with Pilate prior to the Crucifixion. Yet he always had unlimited time for the people who were eager to invest their talents in life.

He spent hours with Martha and Mary and Lazarus at Bethany as he discussed "the better part" of living. He shattered traditions of race and sex to talk with a Samaritan woman about the condition of her soul. He thought through great issues of life with Nicodemus and sacrificed much-needed sleep to explain dynamic truths to him in a midnight interview. He summoned Zacchaeus from his perch on a tree and shared the hospitality of the publican's house in order to relate his soul to eternal things.

Limited geographically, he became limitless in power through the wise use of his rigidly restricted time. That use always related to the deepening of men's insights, the direction of their abilities into channels of usefulness and service.

Only when time is invested in the development of personality—not merely our own, but also the personalities of those with whom we live—can we fulfill our stewardship. Jesus so understood, and to that end he dedicated himself. He expected his followers to do no less.

Whatever our individually allotted span, however limited we may be physically or geographically, we can bring in the King-

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dom when we corporately redeem the time! Already we have changed the world socially. The rise of civilization testifies to that. Already we have changed it culturally. The rise of education testifies to that. Already we have changed it physically. The rise of science testifies to that. In the face of such testimony, who can doubt that we can change the world spiritually if, as partners with God, we daringly invest our time for Him?

Jesus so believed and gave himself without reservation to that ideal.

IV.

The fourth area to which Jesus addressed himself is the *stewardship of courage*.

The stewardship of personality, the stewardship of truth, and the stewardship of time combine to create the stewardship of courage. One cannot hold to the conviction that persons are important, that truth is invincible, and that time is formative without coming to realize that there are certain elements in life upon which he can absolutely depend.

For example, the inescapable law that we must grow or die, revealing as it does the inevitability of natural justice, assures us that an unrelaxing power controls life. So, too, the incisive nature of a love that finds the best in the midst of the worst and transforms it by the sheer force of redemptive magnetism certifies to an undiminishing grace operative in human affairs.

Such knowledge fortifies our intentions and undergirds our decisions in such a way as to develop attitudes enabling us to do things which the world does not expect to be done.

Thus, courage is not a form of bravado that dares to assault the impossible. Nor is it an isolated emotional experience induced by some moment of crisis. It is a way of living consistent with deep-rooted convictions which are themselves based upon the moral reliability of the universe. It is a type of life congruent with the holy purpose of God.

Because he had accepted the stewardship of personality, the stewardship of truth, and the stewardship of time, Jesus inherited the stewardship of courage. It could not have been otherwise.

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Commitments have results, and courage is high upon the list of their consequences. There is no panic where men know the irrepressible power of a divine purpose. There is no defeat where men perceive the ultimate triumph of an ultimate cause.

Jesus lived his entire life in the light of an eternal purpose which gave him such mastery over himself that he always held mastery over the immediate circumstances seeking to engulf him.

Here, indeed, is the secret of courage. Not fearlessness, but the refusal to capitulate to fear is the essence of courage. Gethsemane must precede Easter. But nothing can stop Easter from coming!

V.

The fifth area which Jesus revealed in a new light is the *stewardship of hope*.

Interlaced with the stewardship of personality, truth, time, and courage—and rising above them for all to see—is the stewardship of hope.

Hope is not wishful thinking. It is insight recognizing faith as the final step of reason. It is logic tempered by revelation. It is expectation grounded in conviction. It is anticipation stemming from the belief that what is good is eternal.

Jesus was the steward of hope because he understood the nature of man and the purposes of God. "He knew what was in man." But he also knew what was *proposed* for man. And because he recognized the human appeal of a divine ideal, he had confidence in the future.

This is the reason that he could trust unlettered fishermen with the keys of the Kingdom. This is the reason, too, that, instead of speaking out against slavery and tyranny, he proclaimed the need to "love one another," knowing full well that love breaks all barriers down.

Because he matched the promises of God to the spiritual potential of men, Jesus faced the future with the assurance that one day men would be ready to receive the salvation prepared for them from the beginning of the world.

Part 2

SCHOLARS
OF THE INFINITE

CHAPTER 1

Heirs of the Kingdom

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs
is the kingdom of heaven.—Matthew 5:3.*

IN A BOOK entitled *The Wonderful Year*, William J. Locke has one character who describes the religion of another in these words:

. . . the Bible taught the church the beautiful history of Jesus Christ. The church told a Bishop. The Bishop a priest. The priest told the wife of the subprefect. The wife of the subprefect told the wife of the mayor. The wife of the mayor told the elderly unmarried sister of the corn-chandler, and the unmarried sister of the corn-chandler told Clothilde. And that's all that Clothilde knows about Christianity.¹

No wonder that Clothilde was "religious but not very Christian!" A second-hand faith is not good enough! Unless we know Christ for ourselves, we cannot lay hold of convictions with the power to redeem the world.

¹ Quoted by Halford E. Luccock, *The East Window and Other Sermons* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1925), p. 136.

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Here is an incisive clue to the meaning of the first beatitude. The poor in spirit are humble people who are seeking to establish and maintain a first-hand knowledge of God.

I.

There is probably no Christian virtue which has been more frequently misunderstood than humility. Somehow humility has become popularly associated with the idea that it represents a reduction in character from a higher to a lower estate. Thus, no self-respecting person would lay claim to it.

Actually, the contrary is true. Humility is a definite mark of self-respect. For it testifies to a continuing recognition of need.

The maladjusted person is self-sufficient. The insecure individual often displays an overweening sense of his own importance. The shallow materialist cannot press beyond the immediate system of values as they relate to worldly things. But the true evidence of self-respect is the ceaseless desire to know more than we presently understand and to accomplish nobler achievements than we are now capable of performing.

Self-respect does not lie, therefore, in defending or preserving what we have, no matter how good it is; for such ingrown concerns soon wither the soul. This is the reason that the Medieval Church held that pride was the deadliest of the seven deadly sins. Its destructiveness is to be found, not in what it does to others—though they may suffer grievously because of it—but in what it does to those who are haughty in spirit themselves. St. Paul said the same thing in another way when he wrote to his friends in Rome: "I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment" (Romans 12:3).

The very fact that we possess an ability should awaken us to a need greater than we have yet known. There is no power for which there is no need, and knowledge of the one compels honest persons to recognize the other. The validity of our experience is to be found, not in what it does *to* us, but in what it does *through* us.

Realizing this, the poor in spirit—the humble people of the

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world—refuse to let self-concern divert them from their major task in life. Thus, they are simple enough to believe that, by the grace of God, all things can be worked together for good. So they are neither too proud to serve nor too selfish to share. No man ever respects himself so much as when he respects the rights and responds to the needs of others.

II.

At this point, we behold a very significant characteristic of the poor in spirit. They make no attempt to manipulate people. Non-conformists themselves, they do not ask conformity of others. They build no "pressure groups." They organize no "machine." They establish no hierarchy. They issue no threats. They simply offer themselves for the common good. Yet what they have meant to humanity is immeasurable!

Napoleon Bonaparte, talking with some of his former officers when he was a prisoner at St. Helena, is reported to have said:

Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded great empires; but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for him.

The "Little Corporal" had done more than describe the redemptive ministry of Christ. He had also accurately disclosed the secret of the poor in spirit. The foundations of the Kingdom have been laid, not by might, nor by force, but by the self-sacrificing love of men and women who believe that persons are precious in the sight of God.

Across the centuries these dedicated disciples have given practical expression to their faith in a simple but unique manner. Invariably, they have associated the world's salvation with familiar processes that must ultimately eventuate in a redeemed society. Consequently, long before modern militarists impressed scientists, teachers, mechanics, personnel experts, and communications men into the armed forces of their respective countries to do exactly the same jobs they were doing in civilian life in order to wage war successfully, the followers of Jesus recognized that

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an identical policy would prove effective in the building of the Kingdom.

There were two reasons for this, and both were implicit in the teachings which had come down the ages from Jesus himself.

First, by using what they already knew and had, persons undertaking the task of claiming the world for Christ would not have to fear the awkwardness which might attach to new approaches. Second, they would develop new confidence as they came to see how naturally their own varied and personalized experiences linked them to the over-arching love of God.

Men can do *now* the things for which their normal background has already prepared them. Thus, Peter can leave off casting for fish and begin casting for men. Matthew can desist from collecting coins for the coffers of Rome and commence collecting souls for the Kingdom of Heaven. Luke can divert his skills from curing men's bodies to restoring their spirits. The only way in which men can work significantly for the Kingdom is through the natural use of natural ability devoted to the divine cause. Not magic formulas or foreign encounters, but the consecration of the commonplace holds the "last, best hope" of earth.

The psychological significance of this insight for our day should be self-evident.

If there is anything more deadening than inactivity, it is pointless action. Yet we are a people fast becoming jaded by endless rounds of jockeying for positions which hold only hollow glory when we attain them or exact so much of us that they distill out all the goodness.

Apathy begins with the discovery that energy has been wasted. Normal individuals are no more anxious to exhaust themselves in meaningless tasks than was the surprised and disappointed Alice when, pacing the Mad Queen, she ran as hard as she could for as long as she could only to discover that she had stayed right where she started. Don Quixote, suffering delusions of grandeur, might feel highly virtuous jousting with windmills. But sane men must harness the wind.

Not only must a man's purpose be related to something beyond himself. It must be related to something which is at once

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practical and vital—something without which his world will be worse off and with which his comrades can shape the scheme of things to their souls' highest design.

Comprehending this, Jesus summoned the poor in spirit to concrete tasks. In calling them, he offered no reward other than the realization that what they did was basic to the founding of his Kingdom.

III.

From what has been said thus far, it should be obvious that humility is characteristic, not of weaklings, but of the clear-eyed and the strong. It is the property of those who demonstrate in their lives not only *that* God is but *who* God is. Consequently, it is the hallmark of men and women who have the courage to lean their weight against the years to change the course of the centuries. In the light of their contribution, few of us can seriously study the history of the Church without realizing that any of us can be bigger than the circumstances in which we find ourselves if we will only trust God and take Him at His word.

Nowhere has God promised us that life will be easy. But, as the poor in spirit know, there are many places where He has promised us the power to master life through faith. Not conditions, but attitudes—not what we have, but what we are—enable us to change the course of human events.

This is not to say that we stand or fall alone. Movements may be started by individuals, but they do not develop in a vacuum. Martin Luther inherited the preparatory work of men like John Wycliffe and John Huss, as well as possessing the support of men like Frederick the Wise, before he was able to set the Protestant Reformation in motion. However, had he not taken a stand which made him bigger than his circumstances, the history of the world may have been quite different.

The great people of the faith have achieved their greatness because they were determined to do what they ought to do in spite of their limitations.

The Apostle Paul could not possibly escape his many imprisonments; but he could use the time he spent in Roman dun-

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geons to write his immortal letters that are now part of our New Testament. David Livingstone could not possibly alter the conditions that compelled him, at ten years of age, to go to work in the cotton mills from six o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock at night; but, as he sat before the whirring loom, he could study the books he had bought out of his small pay and so prepare himself for the medical course that permitted him to go to Africa as a missionary.

Where men have possessed the conviction that God has a great purpose for their lives, they have overcome all obstacles to fulfill the divine will.

The humble people of the earth know, of course, that they have not done this in their own strength. Rather, they have done it by allowing the power of God to flow through their lives to a waiting world.

Yet this very knowledge brings with it a tremendous and transforming revelation. For it shows that our faith in God is matched by God's faith in us and that this mutual trust empowers us to use what we have, by our own choice, to work out the Lord's purpose for all men.

CHAPTER 2

Suffering Servants

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.—Matthew 5:4.

PARADOXICALLY, our anguish is our finest hope. There is no more fertile soil for growing compassion than the considered experience of personal suffering. Only those who have fought their own great "whirlwinds of doubt" can understand the struggles in men's souls. None but the lonely heart can know the sheer terror of agonized loneliness. Unless we have experienced "the mighty grief," we cannot comprehend the haunting passion to know "the mighty rapture."

"He jests at scars that never felt a wound," says Shakespeare to sum up the nature of that one experience which makes all men kin. There is a universality to suffering that transcends all barriers of class and creed and color to knit the whole world together "with ties of common brotherhood in pain." Thus, we can never experience the atonement of Christ from the foot of his Cross. We can experience it only when we hang upon a Cross beside him!

All our theologies notwithstanding, until we suffer with the

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Creator the costly sacrifices involved in building "a brave, new world," we cannot know that somewhere out beyond the veil of hot, blinding, human tears sorrow is forever lost in joy. Until then, we cannot recognize the high price of holiness. But when we have walked in the company of the Lord through the terrifying Valley of Decision, we will know, as the eminent English preacher, Percy Clough Ainsworth, once put it, that "We suffer not because we are akin to earth but because we are akin to heaven."

This is the reason that Jesus joined mourning with blessedness. For it alerts us to the fact that we share the creative and redemptive responsibilities of God Himself.

I.

God revealed His purpose for life in the Creation. But Creation did not take place once and for all in some distant eon when chaos and primeval darkness prevailed. That would have brought into being a static universe, and static things perish. Creation takes place continuously, for it has to do with living things and is therefore eternal. Thus, its processes are still going on.

Now, there is no Creation without travail; but that travail is no longer God's alone. From the moment that God fashioned man in His likeness, the children of earth must share the responsibility of shaping things to come in accordance with a high and holy design. Every one of us, said Jesus, has the power of the ultimate in his hands.

Here is one of the profoundest insights of all time. God had no intention of building a world to *give* it away. Instead, it was His purpose to construct it in cooperation with mankind regardless of how long it took or what it cost. And there was a basic reason for this.

What has already been finished cannot be truly shared. For, in such a case, the beneficiary can know nothing of the faith that conceived it, nothing of the long, agonizing labors that brought it forth, nothing of the exhilarating triumphs and numbing defeats that succeeded one another in the struggle to better it, nothing of the "blood, sweat, and tears" that snatched it time and again from defilement or destruction. He has never felt its

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"eternal weight of glory" in the lonely watches of the night. He has never wagered all that he had or ever hoped to be upon its worth. So he cannot see it for what it is: the blood and sinew, the heart and mind and soul of his benefactor.

Only those who have endured together the terrifying pain, only those who have fought together the insidious doubt, only those who press on together to the perfect hope as they dedicate themselves together to a cause big enough to demand all there is of their lives can fashion the kind of character that makes them one in love.

To be sure, an unfinished universe is "crammed with risks"—to use James Gordon Gilkey's apt phrase. But how could it be otherwise in a world of free, moral choice? Always there will be some who clash and quarrel because of greed. Always there will be some who discard ideals because of cost. Always there will be some to whom comfort is more significant than conviction and security more vital than the establishment of the Kingdom.

But God was willing to take the risks. For He knew that always, too, there will be some who rise up to conquer hate with love and overcome sin with sacrifice because, whatever the price, they will not desert the eternal dream.

Here is transforming insight that cuts directly to the heart of the matter, for Jesus was clearly saying that suffering is the price of life at its best.

II.

To the disciples in the school of Christ the word "mourn" thus had a far richer connotation than it holds for most of us. We have associated it almost exclusively with weeping and lamentation. But the very use of the word in the context in which Jesus framed it brought them visions of Moses beseeching God to blot out even the patriarch's memory in order that Israel might be freed of her sins (Exodus 32:32), or of Jeremiah grieving for the immorality of his people to the point of accepting their burden as his own (Jeremiah 8:21). So they understood that only those genuinely mourn who are concerned about whatever blocks the intended spiritual fruition of self or society.

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Here, then, is no mere lamentation over things wrong. Here is an unquenchable, soul-rending passion for things right. Consequently, in the true meaning of the term, those who mourn are idealists whose love of God and men compels them to identify themselves with the manifest destiny of both in a way which the world cannot escape and must respect.

Deliberately, therefore, they accept the high cost of being human so that others may ultimately accept the high privilege of becoming divine. So they sacrifice anything but principle and endure untold misery for conscience' sake.

Undoubtedly, their creeds vary expression with their varied personalities; but their driving concerns embrace the spirit of Eugene V. Debs' classic statement issued on the occasion of his conviction and imprisonment for activities in behalf of what he regarded as basic social justice:

... years ago I recognized my kinship with all living beings and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest of the earth. I said then, I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.¹

In essence, Jesus had already said that in the second beatitude. For he had made it plain that we have no moral right to claim the benefits of society unless we are willing to share the pain of producing them.

III.

Gautama Buddha could seek to eliminate men's problems by counselling the suppression of all desire until the exercise of stern discipline should produce the reward of non-existence. Plato could plan a republic in which superior men would assume the responsibility of thinking for the masses and thus reduce them to automats no longer conscious of vital needs or personal powers. But Gautama's philosophy virtually died out in the land of its birth,

¹ Quoted by Hornell Hart, "Progress Through Fellowship," *The Minister and Human Relations*. Edited by William K. Anderson (Nashville: The General Conference Commission on Courses of Study, The Methodist Church), p. 119.

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while the Golden Age which Athens built upon the labor of her slaves provided no strength to repel the barbarous Spartans.

Only Jesus saw that salvation, whether personal or social, is an aggressive achievement. Therefore, none but the spiritually concerned can accomplish it. For only as men become aware of the power within them and of the opportunity beyond them and then dare to link the two can they bring it to pass.

This means that they must translate insight into intelligible action. To do so, however, they must begin at the level of contemporary thought and guide it through a series of readily comprehended stages to the disclosure of a spiritual purpose which makes men significant to the Kingdom of God.

Obviously, such adaptability demands keen discrimination. Jesus always distinguished very carefully between the actual need of a man's soul and his counterfeit claims. He knew only too well that, restricted by traditions which they fear to slough off—partially because of adverse criticism and partially because they have nothing else upon which to take hold—men often attempt to hide from the truth simply because they do not understand its aggressive nature. They have accustomed themselves to think so much in terms of patent formulas and prescribed situations that they are honestly confused when they find that

New occasions teach new duties,
Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still and onward
Who would keep abreast of truth.²

He also knew, however, that it is not necessarily an irrational stubbornness which thus blinds them to the inevitable. Just as often their attitude roots in ignorance because of their inability to recognize certain basic principles which provide natural outlets for truth.

No amount of haranguing can help such people. Condemnation will never supplant ignorance. Jesus never resorted to censure, therefore, when he talked with individuals who were trying to run away from the truth because they did not understand it. Instead, deftly using familiar experiences, he gradually led their thinking

² James Russell Lowell. "The Present Crisis."

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toward the kind of knowledge which, releasing pent-up spiritual powers, constitutes salvation. Yet, even as he did so, he was very careful to let his listeners make the final statement of the truth for themselves; for he fully understood that men can unreservedly believe only what they have themselves discovered, and they can use effectively only what they unreservedly believe.

By listening to men's accounts of their spiritual aspirations, therefore, or simply by watching their spontaneous response to moral and ethical conditions, Jesus knew what they possessed and what they lacked. The words they failed to say, the hesitancy or deliberateness of their decisions, the agility of their insights as changing circumstances compelled personal and social re-adjustments—all these bore witness to the condition of their souls. For just as physical weakness associates with improper diet, so ignorance and impotence associate with inadequate spiritual nurture.

In both instances, there has to be an underlying determinative factor. Sometimes the formative cause is one over which the individual has no immediate control. Such, for example, is the case of a child suffering from malnutrition because his parents have been unable to provide foods essential to his growth, or of a delinquent youth whose home as far back as he can remember has been "a school for scandal."

Often, however, it is a deliberately concealed factor which saps the individual's physical and moral strength. It does so through the strain of a continuous masquerade.

Psychiatrists have long been familiar with the phenomena of persons losing their ability to speak or to walk because of paralysis induced by a subconscious defense against some deep-seated guilt complex. Nor can these persons speak or walk again until a benevolent accident, or a discerning individual, leads them to disclose their dark secret. Then, slowly at first, like a child falteringly uttering his first sentences or taking his first steps alone, they pour forth their confessions with increasing fervor as, finally relieved of the terrible constriction of fear, they break down the barriers of their minds to attain freedom from awful, self-imposed affliction.

What we frequently fail to see, however, is that this physical experience has a spiritual counterpart. Under the stress of com-

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munity condemnation or self-censure, individuals sometimes unconsciously induce a spiritual paralysis which "freezes" their moral judgment and renders them incapable of holy action. Their plight may originate in bitter remorse for actual violations of the accepted moral code. But it may also issue from a persistent belief that they lack ability to meet the high demands which that code makes of all who would be saved. Yet, whatever the source, they are powerless to break its stranglehold.

The "conscienceless" people whom we so easily condemn are thus often as critically ill spiritually as those whose physical paralysis, evidencing the same guilt complex, elicits our pity. And they must be helped in exactly the same way, for they cannot make spiritual decisions again until someone's sage interest compels them to reveal their dark secret. Only as they bring their repressions to the light can they break down the barriers of their souls and attain moral freedom.

Only those who understand them can help them do this.

IV.

It is imperative, therefore, that we learn to detect the implicit desires, hopes, and fears which expose men's frustrations; and, having found their needs, we must provide channels for their fulfillment.

In this beatitude, Jesus was stating that our basic task is not to teach truth as an instructor of chemistry teaches formulas and affinities. Rather, it is to share truth as a fond parent helps his son to model a ship, the design of which he cannot previously explain for want of a common knowledge. Yet, as it takes form in the child's supervised fingers, the lad's delight and triumph are boundless. For, in the process of its construction, he learns standards of judgment by which to appraise, not the product, but his own unsuspected skill to produce it. Never again can he block the strange creative power within him.

So, in the last analysis, we are "all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). In this knowledge those who mourn take comfort and press on to fulfill the holy purposes of God.

CHAPTER 3

The Constant Meek

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.—Matthew 5:5.

PROBABLY none of the beatitudes has caused so much resentment as Jesus' injunction to be meek. Somehow it seems incompatible with the more desirable qualities of human nature. Have we not always seen our heroes as daring and defiant men whose thrilling exploits are burned on our hearts in letters of fire? Can we so easily forget Joshua and Gideon and David and Paul?

Surely, we say, if Christendom demands the serious acceptance of meekness as a fundamental to the faith, it cannot long endure in a world such as ours. These are times which call for strong men, not weaklings; bold men, not cowards.

Our difficulty with the concept, however, really derives, not from its nature, but from its etymology. Thus, it presents us with a problem which was nonexistent for Jesus' hearers. For it seems self-evident that seasoned fishermen, a calloused tax collector, and a worldly-wise physician would hardly forsake all they had to follow a man counselling servility. Yet each responded to the

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Master's call without a moment's hesitation and remained loyal to him long after Calvary.

I.

Perhaps the most incisive clue we have to the meaning of this term is to be found in an unknown chronicler's appraisal of the patriarch Moses: "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). Even as we read the words we recall how Moses murdered an Egyptian overseer because of his cruelty to a Hebrew slave (Exodus 2:11f.); how he defied Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1ff.); how he quarrelled with God (Exodus 5:22f.; Numbers 11:10ff.); how he became so enraged at the sight of the golden calf that he ground it into a fine powder and compelled his idolatrous people to drink it in the form of a lethal potion (Exodus 32:19f.); how he waged a holy war against Amalek (Exodus 17:8ff.). These are hardly the actions of an individual accustomed to "taking things lying down." When we add the shrewd practicality and hard-headed perseverance demanded by a major undertaking like the Exodus, we begin to see that meekness must have conveyed to the ancient world a connotation much different from that which it holds for ours.

Like so many other words which have changed their nature with their history, a study of this one soon shows that it has undergone a character-forming transformation.

The Greek word which the first evangelist employs in this beatitude describes a colt broken to harness. So it pictures strength brought under purposed control. The figure implies a plow. After all, the colt must be harnessed to something. Now the farmer uses the plow, not simply for his own personal welfare, but also for the welfare of individuals *whom he has never seen and very probably will never see*. But he knows their need; he knows how they depend upon him; and therefore he bends his animal's brawn to the demands of his productive task.

Jesus never thought of the meek as persons whose fiery passions must be quenched. Rather, like James Hamilton, he understood that "Meekness is love at school." Thus, the meek are the

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disciplined people who have integrated their talents with the redemptive purposes of God.

II.

Such an insight could have come only to one who had struggled to decide which way his soul would go. During the wilderness days preceding his ministry, Jesus had known that struggle. One by one he had faced the perennial temptations of mankind. And one by one he had conquered them to prove the power of the disciplined life.

The first victory came at the point of physical pressure. Matthew describes it quite simply, almost as if unaware that the Master is facing a crisis:

And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:2-4).

Involved in this temptation was more than the momentary mastery of hunger. Once and for all Jesus was renouncing the "terrible tyranny of things." Basic to the enticement was the subtle overture to material security, and Jesus knew only too well how destructive security can be.

For this reason he had rejected the shelter of the Nazareth carpenter shop which was his by right of inheritance. Its income may never have been munificent, but its trade would nevertheless have met his accustomed needs; and, in the long evenings, when his work was done, he could have relaxed before the fire with his family or sauntered down to the marketplace to exchange commonplaces with his neighbors. So, too, on the Sabbath he could have found his favorite seat in the synagogue and listened drowsily to traditional teachings traditionally interpreted. Then, at the close of the service, he could have gone home as quietly as he came, with none to condemn him.

But Jesus knew that such a choice could only stultify his mind and encrust his heart with selfishness. Protective days invariably

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conceal the determinative forces which truth gestates. Had he chosen them, therefore, he must have been forever ignorant of the vital nature of life and the redemptive power of love. And like a child recklessly spending its donated coins, he must have been equally impoverished in the time for spiritual accounting.

The tyranny of things lies in the fact that it barter imperishable truth for perishable baubles. Only when men realize this do they scorn the physical pressures which would restrict them to narrow spheres of influence and move on to stake out more certain claims. Thus, Francis Xavier, his conscience stabbed awake by Ignatius Loyola, renounced his riches to shed the light of his new-found gospel upon the nations which sat in darkness, preaching today in the gaudy splendor of an Oriental palace, tomorrow breaking the bread of life in the filthy huts of Malabar fishermen, for the ten short years remaining of his allotted time speeding furiously along the forgotten highways of the world to share God's love with brigands and bedouins, lepers and loathsome diseased sailors, until finally he must die alone at Sanzian. Thus, too, William Carey refused to be shackled to his shoemaker's last because his heart beat as one with the heart of the world; and, forgetting his privation, he fearlessly launched out upon a holy crusade destined to establish the first English missionary society ever to possess the avowed purpose of saving the whole human race!

Jesus knew that nothing is so dangerous to the soul as the passion for personal security.

III.

The second interlocking insight had to do with the passion for social privilege. In a sense it was a natural extension of the first, carrying it to a higher degree. Again Matthew states the case simply:

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

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Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (Matthew 4:5-7).

Behind the colorful Oriental phraseology—which was probably never meant to be taken literally—we can see what must have been a formidable struggle. To understand it we must keep clearly in mind the fact that Jesus was of the lineage of David. This means that he was eligible for the priesthood had he cared to devote his life to the Temple. Nor was the choice to be taken lightly. For it carried with it both affluence and influence.

The high society of Jerusalem consisted primarily of a circle of governing priestly families who cunningly courted favor with Rome and readily accepted her lavish grants. Therefore, the priesthood had become an ecclesiastical aristocracy, honored in spite of its sacrilegious excesses because of its political power.

Thus, had Jesus thrown his lot with the hierarchy, he would have aligned himself with sources of virtually endless revenue as well as with an authority which exempted him from the normal regulations of his day. Besides the numerous perquisites of his office, he could have claimed, tax free, a portion of the duly-established tithes and fees. Likewise, he could have demanded distinctive and costly attire at public expense. And what was politically more important than all these was the fact that he would have associated with Caiaphas as a colleague. Sharing the high priest's coveted patronage, he would never have known the fury of his hatred except as that dignitary breathed his threatenings on "lesser breeds without the law."

In rejecting such prestige, with all that it guaranteed by way of personal security, Jesus emphatically refused to be treated differently from any other individual. Not for a moment would he exact his living from "the sweat of other men's brows" or take advantage of a discriminatory protection.

There were two reasons that he would not do so.

In the first place, such action would be tantamount to an admission that God is a respecter of persons. And, in that event, life cannot be trusted. For, if that be true, the universe is friendly only toward those who, through no particular merit of their own, have found divine favor. Difficulties exist for the rest because

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God's actions are manifestly unfair. The Master flatly repudiated that false and fatalistic belief because it reflected adversely upon the character of God.

In the second place, such action could only produce hopeless division. Men resent those who will not share their experiences. So Jesus carefully assayed, not what he would gain from Caiaphas, but what he would lose through his separation from the common people. That loss, as he quickly discerned, would entail more than security. It would negate his knowledge of truth and deny his capacity for service. But no privilege, however glamorous it may seem, can inspire a man once he becomes useless. Hence Jesus saw that to choose these luxuries and assurances would be only to create hell for himself, while to refuse them would be to provide men with the means of constructing a world patterned after the Kingdom of God.

IV.

Given the first two insights, the third was inevitable. Jesus could have escaped it no more than we can escape the ascent or descent which we ordain when we step upon an escalator. For his original choice had committed him to a line of thought which he must follow to the end. Consequently, the temptation to seek special privilege led directly to the passion for power.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him . . . (Matthew 4:8-11a).

Pride and privation had long since made Israel restless under the Roman yoke. Indeed, Shammai and his followers were already prophesying that the Lord's Messiah would soon "sweep away the Romans by the breath of his mouth." Nor were their teachings falling upon unresponsive hearts.

The rebellions against Archelaus when he acceded to the throne of his father Herod; the tradition of Athronges, a simple

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but fearless shepherd who, with his four stalwart brothers, sought to seize the reins of government following Herod's death; and the insurrection which the ruthless Judah of Galilee had led barely four years prior to Jesus' birth—all provided inflammatory material for Shammai's mutinous propaganda to ignite.

The plain truth, then, is simply this: Jesus was fighting to expel from his own mind the fever of insurgency.

Now this temptation was not as visionary as it may seem on the surface. No less a scholar than Shailer Mathews believes that, if Jesus had taken political advantage of his time, he could have organized and maintained a state. "That such a plan would have succeeded," Mathews insists, "is made almost certain by the subsequent career of Mahomet in almost the same region."

Undoubtedly, Jesus knew the odds for success in the event he should lead a revolutionary army against the tyrants oppressing his people. The disciples who so astonishingly followed him, apparently without previous introduction, must surely have been friends of his youth to respond with such alacrity. The fishermen among them would have garnered invaluable information on their trips to market. The tax collector would have overheard many a highly confidential conversation among those in authority. The physician, trained to swift and keen observation, would have seen much of strategical significance as he made his way freely in the homes of unsuspecting military men. The disciple "which was known unto the high priest" (John 18:16) would have kept him informed of intrigues at court—information vital to the setting of his "zero hour." And because of their telling everyday contacts, all of them would have known whom to summon among the general populace when the hour came to strike for freedom.

Furthermore, the mountains of Palestine offered ample opportunities for ambush. That Jesus was familiar with these rugged ranges is attested by his flight to Caesarea Philippi, which hugs Mt. Hermon at a point overlooking the Phoenician plains and the hills of Samaria. Also, it must be remembered that the Roman soldiers needed one of his own company as a guide when they arrested him in Gethsemane (John 18:2 f.).

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Geopolitics thus favored the advent of a military genius.¹

The very fact of the temptation bears witness to the appeal which potential conquest held for him. To deny it is simply to flaunt facts. Jesus was a child of his people. As such, he was saturated with their dreams. Yet, paradoxically, it was precisely because of their dreams that he fought down the allurements of power. For the prophets had already foretold what the highly respected Hillel was currently proclaiming; namely, that the Messiah must be "a prince of peace."

The more he thought of this, the more Jesus was convinced that there could be no other basis for the universal Kingdom which the Messiah was to establish. Military authority can command. But it cannot inspire. So it cannot coalesce the divergent elements of which the Kingdom must be built. At its best, it can merely subjugate or compromise. Only spiritual forces can re-create. The Kingdom would be a new creation, and old things would pass away. He suddenly saw that this would be so because there is no redemptive power apart from the reconciling goodness innate in all men. Upon that insight he was willing to stake his life.

History was to prove the validity of Jesus' decision. Because of his faith that goodness can break down the barriers which men create between them, he triumphed over every evil force that opposed him and left men the heritage of a transforming conviction. Because of that conviction, Peter was to discard his racial prejudice and answer the appeal of the Italian Cornelius. Because of it, too, Ananias of Damascus, discounting the possible personal consequences, trusted the newly converted Saul, calling him "brother" and standing his sponsor in the unfriendly synagogue.

Every century since has borne its testimony to the cogency of his vision. John Knox, watching George Wishart kiss the

¹ There is internal evidence to support this theory in the almost incidental record which the author of the Gospel of John has inserted into his account: "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself" (John 6:15).

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cheek of his executioner in token of forgiveness, found that the flaming faggots silencing the martyr's lips had set his own on fire. "Black Harry" Hosier, conquering the twin handicaps of color and slavery, inspired Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury in their crusade to win a continent for Christ.

Nor is our own time without its witness. Frances Rockmore Velie tells us how, during World War II, four Quaker women in German-occupied Toulouse, learning that a cattle train packed with eight hundred Jewish evacuees would shortly arrive in the city after two days of waterless travel, immediately seized every available container and worked all night drawing water to ease their agony. But when the train pulled into the station, to their horror the women found not eight hundred but three thousand persons jammed aboard! Rations for eight hundred could only torment three thousand. Better that none be helped than that hundreds be driven mad by the sight of water which they must be denied! What had promised to be a moment of mercy had suddenly become a nightmare.

But one woman resolutely refused to surrender to unholy circumstance. Approaching the Gestapo officer commanding the station, she quietly but authoritatively demanded that he take measures to alleviate the suffering of the prisoners. For a long, tense moment the German captain stared at her. Then he turned slowly to his subordinate. "This woman is from the American Friends Service Committee," he said. "The Quakers saved our village from starvation after the last war." "Yes," mumbled the subaltern, "they fed *us*, too." Thereupon

The Gestapo officer barked an order. SS men hurried on errands of mercy. From the astonished villagers they gathered baskets of food, additional water—enough for three thousand. "There is the spirit of God in every man," the Friend murmured as she watched the Jews eat and drink, fed by their enemies.²

So Jesus had fought through the last temptation to disclose the fact that the meek are the disciplined people whose quiet strength determines the fate of all the world.

² "Global Army of Mercy," *Coronet*, April, 1946, p. 62.

CHAPTER 4

Adventurers in Faith

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.—Matthew 5:6.

UP TO THIS POINT the Master had indicated that the hope of the world's salvation lies in the integrity of individuals who, exercising rigid self-control, actively identify themselves with the purposes of God and the experiences of men. But very wisely, he did not rest his case there. He knew only too well that, without a continuing cause, *purpose can crystallize into prejudice and discipline can degenerate into self-concern*. The atrocities of the Inquisition sharply testify to that.

Jesus stated this subtle fact in the most graphic language he could command. Deliberately, he forced the hostile topography of Palestine to interpret his penetrating insight.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

There was not a man in his audience who did not know, either from personal experience or from personal observation, that Ju-

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dean shepherds could not pasture their flocks long in one place. Essential resources ran out too quickly. The wise herder never waited until the sparse grass was gone or the trickling rivulets had vanished into the dry sands. Instead, alert to steadily diminishing supplies, he drove his sheep out into the arid waste while they were yet strong and resolutely led them through the blistering desert to a more fruitful refuge.

In the wilderness life never stood still. Only death was motionless. So, too, men cannot settle down to live upon the truth which they already possess. While they are strong, they must press on to more fertile revelations—or they must die.

I.

The evidence of a saving faith, said Jesus, is how much we are willing to learn and how far we are willing to be led. Not how tightly we hold to what has been proved, but how eagerly we challenge the unknown is its ultimate test. Thus, long before Thomas Henry Huxley put it so succinctly, he enjoined his followers:

Sit down before the facts as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever Nature leads, or you will learn nothing.¹

But, as Hamlet would say, "Ay, there's the rub." For all too often we are not willing to do religiously what scientifically we do constantly. And we are not willing to do so because we have far less fear of an obsolete religion than we have of an obsolete social order or an obsolete economy.

Rare among us, for example, is the man who finds any heresy in our mastery of nuclear energy. Many of us, in fact—despite our fear of its potential evil—are already speculating upon the benefits of a world wherein whole cities will be climatically controlled from an ingenious scientific center at a nominal tax cost! Material things, we feel, undergo an inescapable evolution. By nature, they cannot be fixed and final. But with religion, matters are different.

¹ "On Science."

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Spiritual ideals, we insist, must not be tampered with. Revealed of God, they are unchangeable for all that we must apply them to changing circumstances. We can bring nothing to them, and we must take nothing from them. Any other interpretation is sacrilegious.

To make such a claim, however, is to ignore the testimony of Hebrew-Christian history. One cannot observantly read the scriptures without seeing how the basic concepts of God, man, sin, suffering, salvation, and immortality have been constantly re-analyzed and re-interpreted in the light of expanding human experience.

Not always have our spiritual forebears known a universal God of love and faith. Nor did they come easily by their ultimate vision. It required centuries of searching and questioning and quarrelling with men and even with the Lord Himself to produce a sound doctrine of divinity.

The nomadic war-god, who in the beginning angrily "shook the wilderness of Kadesh" and sent his floods to protect his people from their adversaries, must give place to an agricultural deity when the Hebrews settled in Palestine. Then, gradually, as he survived the licentious attributes of the pagan Baal, this Jewish land-god must become a strangely nationalistic world-god, who in turn must surrender his position to the ethical Lord whom Second Isaiah, Zechariah, and the daring, anonymous author of the Book of Jonah saw concerned for all the peoples of the earth.²

Similarly, God's relation to evil could not long go unchallenged. The thesis that all suffering is of divine origin and thus constitutes merited punishment raised baffling questions as to the divine character when, on the one hand, that punishment afflicted innocent men like Job and, on the other, took effect through such a wicked instrumentality as the barbarian race whose unchecked violence goaded Habakkuk to demand an explanation from heaven.

It was precisely this problem, in fact, which implemented the

² Cf. Joshua 5:13ff.; Amos 1:2-3; Ezra 1:1-2; Isaiah 44:23ff.; Zechariah 8:2-23; Jonah 3:1ff.

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doctrine of immortality. For if God's character is unimpeachable, then the justice which He so often and so obviously failed to mete here and now must be administered in some future experience. He must vindicate Himself sometime even if He does not balance the scales until death hides His action. Little wonder that Ecclesiastes, tiring of the whole perplexing problem, cynically asserted that life is marked by a senseless inequity which men must endure the best they can!

Not until Jesus clarified Hosea's glimmering insight into the nature of the eternally suffering God did men begin to understand the connection between suffering and character. Yet even today, for all Second Isaiah's portrait of the Suffering Servant or Paul's description of the bruised and interceding Christ (Romans 8:32 ff.), this ancient concept is one of the chief stumbling-blocks to our faith.

What we are trying to say is simply this: Men have always paid a high intellectual and emotional price for the doctrines which their experiences have compelled them to formulate. The historic trail of the Church can easily be traced by the blood-stains of martyrs whose sole crime lay in their refusal to accept tenets which were either incongruous or inadequate to their times.

Our creeds have been wrought with difficulty and revised with danger. Yet the very fact that they have changed has kept them alive. *For genuine doctrine, which alone can survive the crises of history, is the continuing correlation of known facts with conceived purposes.*

This means that, as we gain increasing mastery over physical and social forces, we must see more and more clearly that truth is dynamic because it is radial. Just as a shaft of sunlight pierces the foliage of a forest, penetrating its Stygian depths to illumine a patch of hidden beauty, so truth perforates the darkness of ignorance and tradition to disclose a whole new world of faith.

The wisdom of that faith can be no more static than the historic processes which it seeks to control, as Jesus so clearly implied to those who would listen.

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II.

Our willingness to learn and our readiness to be led thus depend upon the development of a sense of discrimination. There must be conscious effort to recognize what is important. Civilizations are lost, not for want of power, but for want of a significant purpose. Minor issues may burn up the energies of a whole generation only to leave it frustrate. Our contemporary social order testifies only too caustically to that.

In a time when one-half the world is hungry, the other half—bulging with money, machinery, and well-fed men—finds no motive big enough to shake it out of complacency. A rising crime rate parallels increasing material abundance. Juvenile delinquency races like the Red Horseman of the Apocalypse among a people equipped with the most elaborate educational system in the world. A widely heralded "revival of religion" is accompanied by a general disregard of morals. At the very moment when man's achievements are most sharply pointing up the uniqueness of his nature, the problem of meaninglessness runs amuck in our midst. Never have we possessed so much and needed so much more!

Our problem goes back, of course, to the hectic days following the First World War when we tried to substitute excitement for insight and sensationalism for experience. In literature we feverishly worked, not at excavating foundations, but at digging cesspools; and our fervor at this task has increased with the passing years. In philosophy we embraced pragmatism, thus preparing for Jean-Paul Sartre's ultimate renunciation of any and all external support. In politics—all our shibboleths regarding the democratization of the world notwithstanding—we emphasized our indispensability to the welfare of the race. In technology we found the solution of our perennial social problems.

So we lost our sense of the mysterious ways of God with men. Art abandoned its imitation of beauty to become "expressionistic," with little or nothing to express, and reflected its impact in a new child psychology whereby the little dears must not be inhibited from becoming moral and ethical anarchists. More and more, education concentrated on how to make a living rather

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than on how to make a life. Even the church became merely an adjunct to society, often more widely reputed for its suppers and bazaars than for its solemn proclamation of "Thus saith the Lord."

The financial debacle of October, 1929, trumpeting the Second World War to a people too panicked to realize its insinuations, emphasized materialism more than it exposed it. Here and there, to be sure, prophetic voices cried out in the moral wilderness. But their warnings, like that of Amos to ancient Bethel, went unheeded. Not even the dull, deadly business of universal hostilities a decade later awoke us to the predicament actually confronting us. And that despite the frank statement of one of the most admired generals of the time that the problem before us was basically theological!

Age builds upon age, and no generation can escape the consequences of its predecessors' choices. In a fast-paced novel entitled *The Upstart*, Edison Marshall points up our present condition when he leads his hero to appraise one of the book's minor characters in these terms:

... I could look into the man's eyes and see the chains on his soul. The answer was that, willing slaves may obtain an immense conceit, a counterfeit but self-sustaining dignity, by immersing themselves in their masters.³

Whatever the merits of the story, there is no gainsaying the fact that this is a significant insight with profound implications for our day. We are living in a time when we can look into the eyes of scores of people and see the chains on their souls.

There are the businessmen whom a contemporary satirist has described as "going home to the office every morning." There is the eighth-grade schoolteacher who, after twenty-five years in the classroom with responsibility for hundreds of eager and growing minds, declares, "I have never felt that I have a purpose in life." There are the thousands who are seeking personal dignity by submerging themselves in the comforts of materialism,

³ Edison Marshall, *The Upstart* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1945), pp. 190-191. Used by permission.

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in the niceties that make for social prestige, and in the levelling customs of suburbia that guarantee the conceit of mediocrity.

Madison Avenue and Main Street formulate their criteria of success; and their creed for living concludes with the overshadowing phrase, "What profits a man?" Thus, countless numbers of persons see no moral or ethical conflict between their grasp for a "split-level trap" with a boat in the garage and their rejection of any ministry of reconciliation in society as a whole.

Russell Kirk has put it this way:

The conditions of modern American civilization do not encourage the search after God. The good things of life appear to come almost automatically out of factories and department stores. Modern urban man looks to the government, the corporation, and the giant union for protection and plenty. The Protestant of yesteryear passionately sought the salvation of his soul, endeavoring to establish a personal relationship with divine mercy. The average American . . . now tends to tolerate God, rather than to fear him. As a coed remarked, "Yes, I believe in God, but I'm not nuts about him."⁴

III.

Students of history are fully aware that our situation is by no means new. Every civilization buried in the cemetery of the centuries has died of some form of the creeping paralysis with which we are now suffering. But they are likewise aware that the disease need not be fatal.

The long, thrilling history of the Jews testifies to the fact that a people can endure only when they are bound together by a purpose too important to surrender because it provides dynamic expression for God's advancing truth.

Endurance is virtually synonymous with redemptive ideals. There is obviously no incentive to suffer for short-lived aims, nor to fight for causes which will only be forgotten by tomorrow's dawn. The secret of Israel's survival is her conviction that history vindicates character, that right prevails because it is effecting—however slowly—the perfect will of God.

⁴ "Can Protestantism Hold Its Own in a Modern America?" *Fortune*, February 1961, p. 110. Courtesy of *Fortune* Magazine and Dr. Russell Kirk.

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To understand our condition is to be charged with the responsibility for changing it. But to change it calls for new creeds created from new experiences in faith. So, said Jesus, in effect, we must press on in the enthusiasm of a higher loyalty which dares to relate deepening insights to new spiritual approaches in such a way as to bring our time in line with the progressive purpose of God.

CHAPTER 5

Friend of Every Friendless Name

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.—Matthew 5:7.

THE WHOLE MINISTRY of Jesus attests one fact: Mercy is not a beneficence; it is a way of life. Yet, in the strange metamorphosis to which words are subject, we have made the term "mercy" virtually a synonym for moral weakness. That we have done so unwittingly makes our action no less reprehensible. For however blindly we have contributed to its transformation, we are still guilty of undermining its ethical sternness.

Undoubtedly two attitudes which are widely current in our impersonalized society are responsible for this gross misconception.

I.

Probably most of us identify mercy with pity. We are sorry for those whose lot is less fortunate than our own. And smug in the subtle comparison, we resolve to restrict our luxuries or to relinquish some of our minor privileges, not so much to help the needy as to remove the irritating barb with which their need pricks us.

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In doing so, of course, we solace ourselves with the thought that we can legitimately halt our gratuities whenever they become inconvenient. After all, if choices must be made, one's first duty is to one's self. So we weave a web of false righteousness about our little days and rapidly scamper about its pleasing pattern.

The cause of such introversion is not hard to find. A self-exalting charity is always impatient with spiritual realism. Yet mercy can thrive only upon the sacrifices of time and study and critical analysis which disclose the relentless pressure of human needs. Like Goldsmith's vicar, to relieve the wretched may be our pride. But it can never become our passion until we recognize the fact that we are not merciful until there are no wretched to be relieved.

Mercy is not a sentimental act made all the more tantalizing because it half-reveals and half-conceals coveted benefits. Mercy is the honest effort to discern the latent powers and the potential future of the unfortunate individual with the single concern of relating him so significantly to growing responsibilities that he will fit into them as easily as a blade fits into its sheath.

As Christians, therefore, we cannot tolerate anything which would block this liberating usefulness. Nor can we evade anything which would provide its avenues of expression. Whatever the individual's plight, and however abject his condition, faced with his predicament, we must resolve with the Abbot of St. Maurice that

This should have been a noble creature: he
Hath all the energy which would have made
A goodly frame of glorious elements,
Had they been wisely mingled; as it is,
It is an awful chaos—light and darkness—
And mind and dust—and passions and pure thoughts
Mixed, and contending without end or order,
All dormant or destructive: he will perish,
And yet he must not; I will try once more,
For such are worth redemption; and my duty
Is to dare all things for a righteous end.¹

¹ George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Manfred*, Act III, Scene 1.

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To fall short of this ideal is unmerciful.

Many of us, however, sensing the moral inconsistency of pity, have conceived of mercy as absolute and unqualified pardon for those who have wronged us. Obviously rooting in paternalism, this strange conception vaults two false steps of logic at once. For it not only kills the last vestige of social conscience by rigidly narrowing the circle of personal interest. It arbitrarily separates the individual from the changeless requirements of character. So it transforms human experience into moral chaos.

If "absolute power corrupts absolutely," then no less does absolute pardon since it substitutes an irrational act for the corrective processes of salvation. It is in this sense that Shakespeare's senator is right when he declares: "Nothing emboldens sin so much as mercy." ² When the standards are down, the distinctions between right and wrong quickly disappear—and with them the basis of judgment.

But judgment is the source of the redemptive process. Just as a Minnesota spring gives rise to the mighty Mississippi, so the flood-tides of salvation, carrying varied moral and spiritual burdens through rapidly changing scenes, stem from the fountainhead of judgment.

To eliminate the source is to eliminate the experience. We inevitably eliminate the source when we permit men to violate love with impunity or to disregard their potentials without compunction.

However well intentioned unqualified pardon may be, it can only signify our failure to see that mercy is the channel through which love makes character possible. For mercy is to love what the great hydro-electric plants are to Niagara Falls as they transform the cataract's roaring energy into electricity serving half the population of New York state.

Here is no reckless dissipation of strength. Here is concentrated power controlled by laws which cannot be ignored because they determine the nature of the creative force itself. Deviation is destruction. Let Niagara's engineers depart from the fixed principles of their task, and their creativeness is done. The great river will

² *Timon of Athens*, Act III, Scene 5.

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roll on, as it has done for centuries; but darkness will envelop a goodly portion of the land.

In the same manner, love must hold fast to moral laws that cannot be lightly broken because they determine the nature of love itself. Here is no chameleonic emotionalism. Here is no maudlin mingling of compassion and affection. Here is no blending of loyalty and sacrifice in a shallow sentimentalism designed to expel all sense of guilt or to lift us free of life's wearying exactions.

Love is a sacred commitment to truth, honesty, justice, righteousness, and high-mindedness. Thus, it constantly searches the soul for finer appreciation of the good. It cannot lower its standards without losing them. It cannot lose them without destroying its reason for being. Consequently, its character must be possessed of a firmness that withstands the unjustified appeal of the faithless as resolutely as it reaches down to reclaim the repentant.

Richard Lovelace is right, therefore, when he insists to Lucasta:

I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Lov'd I not honor more.³

Man's basic hope rests squarely on the changeless character of love. If he is to endure in a world of bewildering change, making decisions that will ultimately redeem or destroy him, he must have some sure and fixed authority to which he can appeal for guidance. But it must be an authority tempered with understanding and impelled by concern.

Thus, there is no mercy apart from patience. Long-suffering confidence is the foundation of self-respect, for it reflects an admission of worth in the very fact that the wronged will silently wait for the wrongdoer to accept his offer of trust. To recognize this, said Jesus, is to lay hold of the essence of mercy.

II.

Instantly apparent is the reason for Jesus' insistence upon the constant pursuit of spiritual truth. The merciful must be a

³ *To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars.*

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genuinely sensitive people. What may not be so apparent, however, is that sensitivity is cultivated.

Normally, we regard sensitivity as a peculiar attribute making for the general distinctions between commonplace personalities and accounting, in its extremes, for the accomplishments of genius. So we romantically point to the "white-heat" production of Whittier's anti-slavery poems as evidence of a poet's natural intensity of insight and blissfully ignore the fact that these poems are the irrepressible outcry of emergent ideals challenged by crass materialism. Or we stand awe-struck before Turner's great painting, *The Slave Ship*, and, never having observed "the gradation by which art is acquired," conclude from our inability to reproduce it "that it is not only inaccessible to us, but can be done only by those who have some gift of the nature of inspiration bestowed upon them."⁴

Jesus knew better than that. For he was keenly aware that sensitivity is not an endowment complete in itself. If it were, God must definitely be a respecter of persons inasmuch as He would thus grant to one person what He forever denies to another. And, in that event, the worshippers of blind fate would be justified in their melancholy claims.

Jesus insisted that the *basic* differences in men are not innate, but induced. They disclose, not a peculiar capacity, but a degree of co-ordinating concern. Hence they reveal, not what God has preferentially given, but what man has willingly developed.

Consequently, sensitivity is a controlled attribute. As such, it invariably deepens with concern. So long as the end which men seek supersedes self and environment, the soul will broaden its vision and expand its power. But when self becomes the end and aim of life, and environment—as modern materialism teaches—is simply the means by which that end is attained, the soul becomes increasingly myopic.

This does not mean, of course, that it will be any the less quick to see what concerns it. But its range of observation will be limited by the degree of personal commitment which such concern demands.

⁴ Sir Joshua Reynolds, "Genius and Imitation."

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Yet, precisely here is to be found one of the most amazing paradoxes that life offers. The extremity of human selfishness testifies to the limitless capacity for righteousness. For both stem from the same source and use the same channels even though they work toward opposite ends.

History never wrote a clearer parable to demonstrate this elemental truth than when it recorded the fact that the same ship which carried John Wesley as a missionary to Georgia likewise carried "eight casks of rum as a gift to the Indians, though the colony was officially 'dry.'" ⁵

In fact, Wesley's own experience bears witness to the validity of our argument. He refused—for twenty-six logical reasons!—his aged father's appeal to assume the modest little church at Epworth, primarily because Oxford presented him with so many opportunities for self-culture as well as with a company of desirable friends to share his "sweet retirement."

Shortly afterward, however, faced with the prospect of directing the religious life of James Oglethorpe's rehabilitative colony, he could not decline the obvious honor which his good friend, John Burton, had arranged for him. As self-centered as ever, he gladly accepted what he regarded as a Christian mission to the American Indians; and, just before sailing for Georgia, he declared:

My chief motive is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the gospel of Christ, by preaching it to the heathen. They have no comments to construe away the text; no vain philosophy to corrupt it; no luxurious, sensual, covetous, ambitious expounders to soften its unpleasing truths. . . . If I be once converted, myself, God will then employ me, both to strengthen my brethren and to preach his name to the Gentiles.

It was neither the first nor the last time that a man was to seek a spiritual task for his own glorification. Nor are we surprised to find that, running afoul of both men and angels, he was forced to beat a speedy and perilous retreat through trackless wilder-

⁵ James Richard Joy, *John Wesley's Awakening* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1937), p. 47.

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ness from Savannah to Charleston where, taking passage for home, he sadly added these lines to his earlier comment:

I went to America to convert Indians, but oh, who shall convert *me*? Who, what, is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well, nay, and believe myself when no danger is near. But let death look me in the face and my spirit is troubled. Oh who will deliver me from this fear of death? This then I have learned in the ends of the earth, that I have fallen short of the glory of God.

Then began that period of serious soul-searching when the man was actually challenging himself with the startling sermons that he preached to astonished London congregations. After that his "heart-warming experience" at the Aldersgate street meeting house was inevitable.

The true significance of Aldersgate is to be found, not so much in the fact that John Wesley had become a changed man, as in the fact that he had changed direction. He was no less a scholar after May 24, 1738, than he was prior to that memorable day. Only now he gave the profit from his voluminous literary works to feed and clothe the poor. He was no more diligent and no more profound; and, if possibly more eloquent because of his previous humiliation, he was certainly no more daring or idealistic.

The same dogged determinism that had driven him to freedom through an American wilderness now drove him to preach his newly understood gospel to rowdy smugglers in Cornwall, to prostitutes frequenting the filthy streets of London and Liverpool, and to barbarous Kingswood colliers who—as hostile to religion as were the people of Georgia to high ideals—nevertheless listened, first curiously, then penitently, while he told them quietly of "the last, best hope of earth."

The same endless energy wherewith Wesley had zealously visited from house to house in Savannah that he might minister to the sick and solace the orphaned now sent him scurrying into the crowded, dirty hovels of the London slums until he knew more about the living conditions of the underprivileged than any

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other man of his time. Samuel Johnson could toast his feet at the fires of an inn and lament the tragic state of England's affairs, but John Wesley must do something about changing them.

It was Wesley's changed direction that changed the course of world history. The Oxford quadrangle and the Kingswood coal mines were at opposite poles. The fashionable established pulpit and the grimy marketplace were diametrically opposed. Both the quadrangle and the pulpit were protected by walls. The mines and the marketplace were wide open. Men who look at walls see shadows. Men who look at open vistas see the light.

England's hour of salvation came when Wesley went to the gaping mouths of the mines and stood in the hostile marketplaces to tell a gin-crazed, immoral, illiterate people of the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

But in telling them that, Wesley made one fact unmistakably clear. God does not simply save men *from* something. He saves them *to* something.

If the hope of earth rests in human redemption, then no less does the hope of heaven. Men must come under the conviction of their sins, not simply because they are vile, but because their sins block them from attaining the stature of saints.

Above all else, they must see and forever remember that God speaks with their voices, that He uses their heads and hands and hearts to fashion the objects of His holy will. So let them expect no miracle. Instead, let them lay hold of the perfect love of God; and, inflamed by His purpose, let them seek their neighbor's welfare. For it is not what is outside that controls the direction of life, but the responsiveness of the soul to a high and just cause.

Thus, Wesley made men aware of those qualities which persuaded God to pronounce His creation good. The force which the outraged poor of France later released in the terrors of fratricidal rebellion, John Wesley turned into the channels of evangelism. He did it by a clearly reasoned, calmly delivered, magnificently practical interpretation of Jesus' faith in the common people. And in doing it, he had made clear the profoundest depths of mercy.

How easily one of his converts, sensing the eternal significance

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of Wesley's revelation, might have anticipated Roy Croft's apostrophe to a similarly inspiring friend:

I love you,
Not only for what you are,
But for what I am
When I am with you.

I love you,
Not only for what
You have made of yourself,
But for what
You are making of me.

I love you
For the part of me
That you bring out;
I love you
For putting your hand
Into my heaped-up heart
And passing over

All the foolish, weak things
That you can't help
Dimly seeing there,
And for drawing out
Into the light
All the beautiful belongings
That no one else had looked
Quite far enough to find.

I love you because you
Are helping me to make
Of the lumber of my life
Not a tavern
But a temple;
Out of the works
Of my every day
Not a reproach
But a song.

I love you
Because you have done
More than any creed
Could have done
To make me good,

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And more than any fate
Could have done
To make me happy.

You have done it
Without a touch,
Without a word,
Without a sign.
You have done it
By being yourself.
Perhaps that is what
Being a friend means,
After all.⁶

III.

What, then, of the apposition: "for they shall obtain mercy"? Was this the Master's way of saying, "My service for my soul"? Was he simply reversing Faust's covenant with Mephistopheles?

Such a conception of spiritual barter is older than history. Superstitious lore and religious literature abound equally with it. It is no more foreign to the ancient Hebrews than it is to Greeks and Romans, for just as dying Socrates requested Crito to pay his debt of a cock to Asclepius,⁷ so Jacob raised his ebenezer at Beth-el (Genesis 28:18-22). Not even the circle of the disciples was free from it, as the quarrel between James and John clearly shows (Matthew 20:21).

Nor is our contemporary world lacking its bargain-seekers. The sick who promise God anything if only He will restore them to health; the frightened who pledge themselves as tithers provided God will extricate them from pitfalls of their own making; the doomed who dare not die without haggling for their souls—these, and countless others, keep alive the fallacy of a great transaction.

But Jesus was far too wise to offer religion on bargain terms. He knew that, when the price is marked down, there is something wrong with the product. Moreover, a God who can be inveigled into such a compact is hardly big enough to control the course of

⁶ Roy Croft, "Love."

⁷ Phaedo.

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history or the fate of humankind. And the God whom Jesus served was in full command of both.

What Jesus was referring to, therefore, was the inevitable interplay involved in the natural processes of spiritual growth. On another occasion, speaking to the multitude which had gathered from Judea and Jerusalem and Tyre and Sidon to hear him preach, he was to clarify this emphasis.

. . . a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil . . . (Luke 6:43-45 KJV).

In short, seeing that their efforts affect the lives of others to the point of completely transforming them, the merciful will discover how intimately they are themselves related in character to the Redeemer God. They have stood where He has stood. They have seen what He has seen. And, in spite of all the evil that men have done to them, they have loved as He has loved. So they will develop an unswerving faith in human nature and an incurable optimism regarding the shape of things to come.

CHAPTER 6

Conquerors of Fate

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.—Matthew 5:8.

PURITY OF HEART is not a state of being attained through the careful keeping of codes or the scrupulous administration of ritual. Instead, it is a relationship with God. It is the continuing experience of the divine fellowship. It is the conscious expression, in word and deed, of a deepening communion which eventually enables us to say with the Apostle Paul that we "live and move and have our being" in the Creator of all the earth. In short, it is oneness with God.

Thus, God is not merely the source of life. He is likewise the source of all good, out of which ethical and spiritual values must flow.

To Jesus, this goodness resident in God was absolute. Consequently, men cannot compromise because God does not compromise. Where character is at stake, steadfastness of principle and singleness of purpose are imperative. The scholars of the infinite must persistently judge their lives in the light, not of earth, but of heaven.

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To help them understand this is Jesus' purpose in pronouncing the sixth beatitude.

I.

If God seems to stand over against the world, Jesus implied, it is only for the purpose of saving the world. Apart from God's righteous character, the world has no hope. It is the nature of God which gives meaning to life; and He will be true to His nature, come what might. As the moral Ruler of the universe, He must apply the moral law, both to His own thought and action and to the course of human affairs. As Creator, He must hold fast to that which is good because of the love He bears for men. For God knows that men will build their earth out of the kind of heaven they possess.

Here is an authority which is rooted, not in vagaries, but in a purpose important enough to be incorporated in the life of God Himself! This is the reason that Amos identified the search for good and the search for God as one and the same search (Amos 5:14). This is the reason, too, that Hosea stressed personal purity as the basis for continuing fellowship with the Lord (Hosea 6:1-6)—an emphasis which Jeremiah, profoundly influenced by his broken-hearted predecessor, translated into the terms of a new covenant requiring men to break up the fallow ground of their souls and to open their hearts to the indwelling presence of God (Jeremiah 4:3-4).

In like manner, Micah, anticipating Jesus' insight by nearly a thousand years, identified purity with a quality of soul that gave expression to the divine purpose in the ordinary experiences of life. How readily the man from Moresheth could have agreed with Francis Peabody when he wrote:

From scheme and creed the light goes out,
The saintly fact survives;
The blessed Master none can doubt
Revealed in holy lives.¹

¹ *The Christian Life in the Modern World*, p. 199, quoted in *England: Before and After Wesley*, by J. Wesley Bready (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited), p. 309.

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The character of heaven reveals the requirements of earth; and the person who has done nothing to lead his neighbors out of their sin can expect only catastrophe when he looks upon the face of God. (Cf. Matthew 25:31-46.) Men cannot *have* the truth unless they *do* the truth.

II.

Purity is thus a way of life commensurate with the righteous will of God as that will is revealed through His sacrificial love. It is the overflow of an inner experience which stems from a deepening insight into the purposes of God and an expanding concern for the conditions of men. Consequently, it is the fruit, and not the source, of faith.

Here, indeed, is a consoling thought. Were it necessary to attain purity before we could have faith, few of us would ever find salvation. We do not begin with perfection and move out to perfect the world. Rather, we begin with faith and move on toward perfection in two simple, but vitally significant ways.

First, we must make a personal commitment—without reservation—to the will of God to the extent that we understand that will at the moment of the commitment. This means that each of us must start where he is on the spiritual ladder and begin to climb according to his immediate strength.

To be sure, in this process repentance for the past may be essential; but it should not be permitted to become paralyzing remorse. To accept the forgiveness of God is to accept the promises of God; and these promises make possible a whole new way of life. For they carry with them the power of God.

Thus, true Christianity does not offer us an escape from responsibility. Instead, it confronts us with the challenge to accept increasing obligations. As a consequence, it stresses the fact that we live in the kind of world where we have the capacity to change things because we ourselves can change.

Nowhere did Jesus emphasize this concept more strongly than in his effort to comfort the disciples during the ominous days immediately preceding his death: "I say to you, he who believes

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in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do . . ." (John 14:12). And history bears him out.

For centuries the race has been advancing in its mastery of the physical world. As long ago as the year 3,000 B.C. men had developed forms of civilization in Egypt, China, India, Asia Minor, and Central America. They had done so by progressively controlling physical circumstance. They began with arid waste or virgin wood and, doing the best they could with what they had, fashioned a new way of life.

First they had only human muscles for their motive power. Then they yoked animal muscles. Then they devised simple tools, such as the roller, the inclined plane, and the lever. Then they harnessed the wind, and dammed the water, and compressed steam, and manufactured electricity, and unlocked the secret of atomic power, and now tremble expectantly upon the verge of a hydrogen age.

First they conquered the earth on which they lived; then they spanned the sky above it; then they penetrated the stratosphere; now they are literally knocking upon the doors of Paradise itself—or hell, according as they use their newly acquired and still mysterious powers.

Men have already mastered their physical world, even as Jesus said they would.

Who can control physical things can control the social order which produces them. Increasing power entails increasing responsibility. And Jesus unequivocally insisted that we are matched to the responsibility. "As thou didst send me into the world," he prayed in the garden, "so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). The important word here is the word "as"—*for the same purpose*. What I have done to redeem men, Jesus affirmed in effect, my followers can also do. And again history bears him out.

Unlettered fishermen like Peter changed the thinking of the First Century and paved the way for the ultimate transformation of the mighty Roman Empire. In the Middle Ages St. Francis of Assisi evolved a new definition of charity and, try as they might, men have not been able to escape it across the centuries

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since. John Howard, in 1773, anguished by what he saw, fought relentlessly until he achieved vitally needed prison reforms in an England that had become hardened to the criminal's plight. Our own time has seen Mahatma Gandhi, martyred like the Master, beat down the horrible caste system of India through a faith bigger than timeless tradition.

The age is always waiting for the man, and progress comes one step at a time. The highest insights begin with our first efforts to reach toward them.

But, to make the kind of commitment that enables us to dare great things for God, we must take the second step of faith toward perfection. We must develop the simplicity to wonder.

God has not spoken His last word. He has other revelations yet to make, but He can make them only to minds that are open to new ideas and to hearts that are prepared for new experiences. Therefore, we must seek, not only to grasp the truth, but to explore its implications. We must do this humbly, earnestly, expectantly. We must do it with a will to find and to follow the progressive disclosures that God is always ready to provide for us. We must do it eagerly and in the determination that "where He leads me, I will follow." For only in this way can we develop in ourselves the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Only thus can we become new creatures in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17).

It is not enough, therefore, simply to know what we believe. Nor is it enough to know *why* we believe it. Rather, we must study our belief in the light of three basic facts: first, how it affects what we are; second, what difference it makes in what we do; and, third, how it changes the place where we live.

Such a study is not easy in an age like ours—an age which too often thinks of the Church as a social institution rather than as a social conscience. For this reason we often judge ourselves by the standards of those around us instead of by the possibilities that are within us. We become too easily satisfied with being "good enough." We too readily seek "peace of mind" in a time when great spiritual issues are locked in a life-and-death struggle that leaves no place for peace of mind. We too lightly accept material-

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istic standards of success and feel that we have "arrived" when we get a new sports car, a membership at the country club, or a promotion that we have coveted because of the status it brings.

The danger, of course, is all the greater because "everybody's doing it." To be different is difficult. But it is the only way to "see God."

III.

The question immediately arises as to what Jesus meant by this promise. Perhaps he worded it as he did because of a contemporary custom with which his followers were familiar. His simile would thus clearly convey to them the deeper meaning he had in mind.

In Oriental palaces only the most honored servants were privileged to look upon the face of the king. (Cf. Esther 1:14.) These were they who had proved their trustworthiness. They had been true to his cause in difficult times. They had stood fast in periods of danger. They had showed understanding in the midst of criticism. They had sacrificed personal privileges in order to be loyal to his designs for peace. In short, they had been weighed in the balances and found not wanting.

Purity of heart is a spirit of loyalty embracing the eternal purposes of God. It is an attitude of dedication recognizing that, not only must every man stand in judgment before God, but that he must do so because the redemptive power of the Lord is locked up or loosed through him. Only those who seek to exalt Christ in every area and avenue of experience understand this. Only they pledge their lives, their fortunes, and their mutual honor to him. None but they can become "the dear Lord's best interpreters" in the midst of things as they are.

In 1873 a humble woodcarver in the little village of Oberammergau posed for his picture. The finished product was just about what one would expect: the simple, honest, weather-beaten features of an ordinary individual whose face was no more or no less appealing than the face of any of his fellow townsmen.

In 1902 the same man posed for his picture again. But this

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time the finished product bore startling resemblance to a portrait of Christ!

What had made the difference?

In the twenty-nine years that had passed since the first picture was made, Anton Lang had enacted the role of Christ in the famous Passion Play. Nearly thirty years of studying the life of Jesus, memorizing his teachings, exploring his characteristics, absorbing his concerns had so completely changed the simple wood-carver that his neighbors saw the Master living in him.

This is the secret of the pure in heart. They shall see God because, like the Apostle Paul, they can honestly declare: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

CHAPTER 7

The Children of God

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall
be called sons of God.—Matthew 5:9.*

PEACEMAKERS have never been popular. This is largely because they have insisted upon emphasizing the fundamental relationship between human hope and human character. In a world where "only the strong deserve the spoils" such a relationship is hard to see, still harder to understand. Thus, men resent what seems to imply a sentimental withdrawal from the sterner issues of life.

I.

Basically, this disdain stems from a certain popularized philosophy of history. At heart, we are all hero-worshippers. Therefore, both the great men of the ages and the great men of the age become for us a sort of *alter ego*. We find ourselves, as it were, in their daring exploits. So, with James Russell Lowell, we lionize those

Who pitched a state as other men pitch tents,
And led the march of time to great events.

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For most of us, history is Captain John Parker facing Major Pitcairn's regulars. It is a freedom-hungry mob storming the Bastille. It is Dewey at Manila Bay. It is Patton cutting a crimson swathe through the fields of Europe. Always, it is the men of dramatic action, the spectacular conquerors, who claim our interest and our allegiance.

But the victory of the battlefield may be nullified at the council table. Bismarck's treaty ending the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, the Treaty of Versailles which officially closed the First World War in 1919, and the continuing "Berlin crisis" incident to the peace negotiations of 1948 bear stark witness to this fact.

The peacemaker is more than a pacifist. He does not shrink from brute force because of personal or social apprehension. Nor does he seek to avoid trouble by any available means. To hold such concepts is to misunderstand his basic purpose. Actually, his concern is not the elimination of power, but its proper use. For he knows that peace is as dynamic as war and that it must be just as dynamically maintained.

One cannot deal passively with the prime factors of life. Struggle is one of those factors. The seed fights its way through the soil to reach for the sun. The stream battles its widening way to the sea. The soul of man cannot find uncontested perfection.

This does not mean, as the peacemaker knows only too well, that we must engage in constant fratricide. Far from it. Instead, it means that we must put every cherished ideal through the crucible of practical experience and honestly assay the result. Then we must compare it with the results which our fellow-workers have obtained in similar processes. We must check and argue and prove. We must meet challenge with reason and assertion with challenge. And always we must do it with the design, not of subordinating our opponent—a military necessity—but of appropriating his strength to a mutual and higher purpose, even as the seed absorbs nourishment from the soil without destroying it and the stream assimilates the countless rivulets it meets and never empties them.

For peace is a matter neither of subjugation nor of compromise.

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Peace is "fellowship in a cause greater than all our differences" ¹ and higher than all our ambitions. It is identification of the self, individually and nationally, with the deeper needs and the present conditions of men, not for what they might *do*, but for what they might *become*. Hence it transcends compacts and agreements—which are inherently selfish and protective and, therefore, negative—and demands the highest interest in things mutually constructive. Peacemaking is no "balancing of rights." Peacemaking is the extension of rights into spheres of influence which they ought, by their very nature, to be affecting.

Yet it is precisely here that our sensuous society has discounted the peacemaker. For we have persistently associated peace with material advantages. Put baldly, our creed has been this: Give men a sufficiency of production and freedom of expenditure, and you will have peace.

Oddly enough, we seem never to have learned that economic determinism offers no more ground for peace than does the political expediency of the treaties with which we have terminated our various wars. Both leave the old suspicions, the old grievances, and the old greed to twist and bore beneath the surface until they finally erupt with disastrous effects. Our philosophy of history and our faith in economic panaceas have thus blinded us to the true nature and task of the peacemaker. To see them we must re-think our doctrine of man.

II.

Because he accepts a universal God who has an over-all plan for life, the peacemaker believes in a unified humanity standing with dignity before its Creator. Such divisions as exist he regards as artificial and arbitrary. Consequently, he must uproot whatever prevents unity and replace it with revelations and convictions which bind men inextricably together. Toward this end, he boldly declares that the divine purpose *for* life builds only upon the

¹ James Reid, *The Key to the Kingdom: Studies in the Beatitudes* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), p. 182.

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human purpose *in* life. If God's way is to prevail, it must do so through the will of men.

At this point, Jesus' teaching concerning the fatherhood of God is uniquely fundamental to the role of the peacemaker. For through it he relates all men to one another, not simply by the circumstance of their origin, but by the transforming purpose of their mutual spiritual inheritance. In doing so, of course, he was again keeping faith with the best Hebrew tradition.

The psalmist tells us that God watches man "with wide-open eyes." This is the literal meaning of the phrase, "Thou art mindful" (Psalm 8:4). Such description indicates that God is absorbed in us in the same way that parents are absorbed in their child. In that absorption they find a new expression of their own life. For in a very real sense, the fulfillment of their fondest hopes lies in the child's assumption of growing responsibilities which make their love meaningful.

While nonetheless genuine, when this love is expended on profligates and egotists it experiences only frustration; for love must find completion, not so much by what it does as by what it inspires. Thus, when the loved one senses and seizes a purpose in life which is common with theirs and yet presses beyond their comprehension of it, he enables those who love him to match their own highest potential because they have paved the way for the effective expression of his talents and the expansive fulfillment of his capacities. Without his acceptance of their trust, they cannot find their own fullness of life.

III.

Here is one of the profoundest implications of our faith. Love must be shared if it is to endure. Where it cannot endure, the soul is desolate. When the soul is desolate, as Theodore Dreiser testifies, life is meaningless.

Clearly, Jesus linked man with God in a significantly intimate relationship rooted and grounded in love. Whatever man might do to annul that relationship, God would still exist. But He could no more enjoy the fullness of eternity than frustrated parents can

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enjoy life. So we come to the cardinal characteristic of the peacemaker's task.

The peacemaker must build the superstructure of the new order upon the dynamic principle that man is the co-creator of destiny. While he may not always understand this mutually vital experience, man is always conscious of it, just as a child inherently recognizes the reality and security of a family experience which becomes increasingly meaningful with the enlightening years. Thus, he comes to the revolutionary realization that God and man live by the same laws and redeem through the same love. The human and the divine struggle are one.

This was one of the profoundest insights of the Old Testament prophets, and Jesus built soundly upon it. Like his predecessors in Israel, he, too, was convinced that God remains upon no celestial watch tower observing tides of social and spiritual conquest as they sweep across the world to change the face and direction of history. Rather, He struggles shoulder-to-shoulder with creatures who are like Him because the affairs of earth affect the purposes of heaven.

If this were not so, Creation would be pointless; and God's attempts at self-expression would be impotent. An eternal God must be an active God, for whatever becomes static must die. But if He is to remain God, His activity must have a purpose worthy of His character. Let Him divert His industry to lesser causes, or let Him compromise with evil, and He will turn heaven into hell through the loss of His self-respect. Let Him devote His vigilance to the guarantee of justice and spiritual enlightenment, sharpened and crystallized by His stern adherence to righteousness, and He will augment the splendor of Paradise.

Thus, the destiny of man and the holiness of God are vitally interrelated; for human life finds meaning in the will of the Lord, and the will of the Lord finds fulfillment in the consecration of His people. God and man share the obligations and opportunities of life in a way designed to undergird the moral dignity of both.

This is the reason that, in the Creation, God made man in His own image. The biblical affirmation to this effect has caused

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much speculation among our contemporaries. But Jesus probably understood the expression to mean that man is God's earthly ambassador.

The significance of the concept becomes clear to us if we reduce it to the ordinary terms of statesmanship, for then we see that it means simply this: When and where the president, the king, or other governing official cannot personally attend the concerns of his country beyond its borders, he sends an emissary, or representative, who, going in the sovereign's stead, carries with him a commission to act, with full authority, in the best interest of his nation. In a very real sense, as he undertakes his duties in the name of his government, the agent becomes the image of the sovereign who sent him.

When God commissioned man to develop a moral and ethical society on earth, He literally turned man into His image. This is not to say that man *became* God. Rather, it is to say that man was empowered to *act* for God.

It can hardly be overlooked, however, that such commission not only conveyed responsibility; it likewise evidenced respect. No person in authority appoints an ambassador whom he disparages. The dignity of man is nowhere more strongly emphasized than in this task which God has given him.

But, having said this, one must immediately press on to point out the fact that the dignity which man derives from God is not the dignity of equals. God is always God, and man is always man. Over and over the prophets stressed this distinction; and Jesus emphasized it still further when He responded to the Rich Young Ruler's greeting by saying, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God . . ." (Matthew 19:17 KJV). To claim otherwise constitutes impiety and produces grave results, as the story of the Tower of Babel clearly shows (Genesis 11:1-9).

Nevertheless, it is this inherent dignity which makes peace possible. The gift of the Spirit carries with it the qualifications of the Spirit; and, through these qualifications, "deep speaks unto

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deep" as men exercise the freedom of moral choice to change the world.

"Give a man a consciousness of what he is," said Schilling, "and he will soon be what he ought to be." Precisely so. Those who reach out for the higher revelation eventually incarnate it. Those who induce them to reach out are the peacemakers.

IV.

Plain, then, is the responsibility of the peacemaker. Having tapped artesian truth, he must transmit it to the uninformed by harmonizing personal abilities with an objective big enough to redeem men from their baser lot. Thus, fully aware of human frailties, he is not afraid to be misunderstood because he understands. Accordingly, he looks behind what men do to lay hold of their impelling motives since he knows that even evil motives are merely substitutes for the inherent passion for improvement. So he tears aside the camouflage of circumstance and brings men face to face with their own souls.

For the peacemaker is committed to the proposition that he is God's man and that he must serve *all* God's people, defending their rights and denouncing their conceits. He must be concerned for the weak. He must be the conscience of the strong. He must motivate the indifferent. He must reclaim the lost. He must be willing to suffer for the sake of truth and to sacrifice to assure justice. He must pluck up and break down. He must destroy and overthrow. He must build and plant. And in it all, he must keep love alive in his own soul, never allowing his defeats to embitter him or his successes to make him proud, always recognizing that "the great man is one who sees his shadow from the shoulders of those who hold him up." Not cleverness or versatility, but constancy of commitment and purpose, binding him to a cause bigger than his own interests, constitutes the final ground of his hope.

Thus, the Frank Laubachs will go on inspiring "each one to teach one." Thus, the Martha Berrys will go on keeping the Appalachian paths well-worn with their redemptive missions to the eager mountain folk. Thus, the Dag Hammarsjölds will go on

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laying the full measure of their devotion upon the altar of human freedom. For each, in his own way, will understand that

Peace does not mean the end of all our striving,
Joy does not mean the drying of our tears,
Peace is the power that comes to souls arriving,
Up to the light where God Himself appears.²

² G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, "The Suffering God," *Rough Rhymes of a Padre*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton. 1918) p. 62.

CHAPTER 8

Redeemers of the World

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.—Matthew 5:10-12.

CANDIDATING for the presidency of the United States in the fateful campaign of 1860, Abraham Lincoln is said to have startled the politicians of his day by solemnly proclaiming:

I know there is a God and that He hates injustice and slavery. I see the storm coming and I know His hand is in it. If He has a place and work for me, and I believe He has, I am ready. I am nothing, but truth is everything.¹

In essence, the Great Emancipator had repeated the all-out commitment which Jesus had formulated in the eighth beatitude.

¹ Quoted by James Reid, *The Key to the Kingdom: Studies in the Beatitudes* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), p. 92.

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In the hour of crisis the fate of the American republic hung upon this affirmation. To no less degree, the present fate of the world roots in the same pledge.

I.

Some scholars have interpreted this last beatitude in terms of purely external reaction. They hold that Jesus was warning his followers that contradictory loyalties must always engender bitter antagonisms. So they paraphrase his statement thus: Judge your life by the bitterness and cunning which evil employs against you; for the more malignant the struggle, the greater your grasp of truth, the nobler your relationship with God. Remaining steadfastly at your post, without quarter or compromise, you prove to the world the validity of your faith. Salvation comes only by way of the cross.

Now there is just enough truth in this interpretation to make it misleading. Obviously, whoever is God's ally must alienate God's enemies. But it does not necessarily follow that every struggle in which we engage puts us on the Lord's side.

Ideals wrongly motivated are just as destructive as the lack of ideals. For they confuse the mere force of an experience with the redemptive virtues which Jesus taught. The zeal for martyrdom which characterized many Christians during the Crusades testifies to that.

Such false ideals invariably lead to the coterie of the closed mind. Defensively accepting a stereotyped pattern of conduct, the members of that coterie will brook no departure from it. Thus, they become self-appointed champions of the faith, defending its sacrosanct creeds from attacks of heresy and piously exonerating their actions in the name of God. As Minos Devine reminds us, history records no sadder chapters than those which tell of Calvin putting Servetus to the stake, of Sir Thomas Browne superintending the burning of "witches," or of Oliver Cromwell massacring the Irish at Drogheda.²

² *The Religion of the Beatitudes: A Study of the Christ's Teaching based on Addresses Delivered at the Church of All Hallows, Lombard Street, E. C., during Lent, 1917* (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1918), p. 154.

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It is quite possible, therefore, that, in spite of an individual's earnestness in meeting antagonism, his spirit may be totally foreign to the character which Jesus was describing in this beatitude.

The Master was concerned, not so much with the external reactions of those whom men enraged, as with their own inner experience. For he knew only too well how much depends upon what has happened to our thinking as we have to face opposition. Hence, in effect, he was simply declaring what Walt Whitman was to echo some eighteen hundred years later:

Have you learn'd lessons only of those who admired you,
and were tender with you, and stood aside for you?
Have you not learn'd great lessons from those who reject you,
and brace themselves against you? or who treat you
with contempt, or dispute the passage with you?³

What Jesus was saying was simply this: Spiritual conflict must be properly evaluated. But proper evaluation can be made only in the light of a truth which is both transcendent and immanent, attainable for the asking, yet irresistably directive once it has been attained. For there must be some final authority to which judgment can appeal. Since human experience and divine revelation have already collaborated in disclosing that truth, it only remains for the individual to "screw his courage to the sticking place" and appraise his life's struggle through its moral and spiritual exactions.

II.

Opposition always drives us back to soul-searching analysis. Thus, the first step in our religious strategy must be the ascertainment of our actual spiritual condition. This means that we must survey the field of our moral and ethical influence without bias, frankly recognizing our faults and deliberately taking them into account as we plan for Christian living.

³ *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman as Prepared by Him for the Deathbed Edition*, with an Introduction by Malcolm Cowley, Two Volumes, Volume 1 (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy), "Stronger Lessons," p. 448.

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The world will be redeemed, not by sinless saints, but by men of conviction who, despite their sins, refuse to relinquish their ideals. Just as the deepening darkness only brightens the glimmering star, so the juxtaposition of weakness and strength will only magnify our capacity for spiritual conquest.

It goes without saying that we invariably find it difficult to eliminate handicaps that are deep-seated because of their long duration. But to know these handicaps for what they are is to bridge them with holy compensations. If we cannot eliminate them, at least we need not let them stop us. Furthermore, we can actually bend them to a higher purpose, as C. H. Voss has substantiated for us through a keen observation which he made in the Norton Art Gallery at West Palm Beach, Florida.

Among the rare and beautiful Oriental jades comprising the Gallery's magnificent collection there is one which depicts a lovely scene "cut in brown relief against a white background." A deep brown flaw had marred the otherwise perfect silicate in its natural state. But the Chinese artist, centering his attention on the imperfection, had skillfully carved it into an unusual and enduring design.⁴

In like manner, wisely viewed, our faults disclose the larger pattern of our lives. If they did nothing else, they would teach us to understand the failures of others. Because we have erred and come short of the glory of God, we can sympathize with those who have made the same misjudgments or who have yielded to the same blinding passions.

David weeping for Absalom is more than a father mourning his dead son. He is a sinner sharing the sorrow of his son's lost estate. Before such common experience our attitudes invariably become less critical and more constructive. For we are increasingly aware that we have no right to tear down unless we can rebuild. But neither do we have a right to rebuild unless we can build something better. And that, of course, we can do only when we permit the divine purpose to direct our thinking beyond self-interest and to demand sacrifices surpassing self-preservation.

⁴ *The Upper Room*, April, May, June, 1944, p. 58.

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Here is a source of strength too often unsuspected. Men cannot beat down those who understand them. Nor will they long resist those who have triumphantly passed through experiences similar to their own.

To regard our faults in this light, however, is to be forced back into genuine humility. So we have come full circle. For if our frailties teach us much concerning our fellow men, they teach us equally much concerning God. Perhaps in no other way could we perceive His infinite patience as, despite all our failures, He maintains His faith in our ultimate reclamation of nobler good.

The very fact that God restrains His hand before our blunders, refusing to set aside the natural order and quietly waiting for our wilfulness to work His will, is our surest evidence of His constancy. No earth-shaking miracle could ever bind us as close to the divine heart as does the simple faith which the very absence of that miracle discloses.

What comfort can a Saviour bring
To those who never felt their woe?
A sinner is a sacred thing
The Holy Ghost hath made him so! ⁵

This is probably the most decisive of the factors which shape our character. For when we see that our weaknesses only foreshadow our strength, we attain the courage of a great conviction and launch boldly upon the holy crusade for which God's world is waiting.

It is no accident that Alfred Lord Tennyson, hiding from life at Epping, should cry out in utter despair

I sit within a helmless bark ⁶

at the very moment when dwarfed, hunch-backed, ugly William Wilberforce was successfully battling for the abolition of the English slave trade.

⁵ Quoted by F. W. Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings, or Texts That Made History* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1920), p. 193.

⁶ "In Memoriam."

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But long since the Apostle Paul had anticipated their experience. For once he saw himself as "the chief of sinners," he knew that our strength makes us a little more than men; our weaknesses, a little less than God.

III.

Such critical analysis compels us to crystallize our philosophy. Growing beliefs must be unified through growing experiences. For every observed truth roots in an unknown, but equally secure, truth from which it branches out in some readily experiential form.

Nor could it be otherwise. Just as Hebrew monotheism arose to meet men's needs on the basis of historic experience, so our philosophy must meet the challenge of the present day by distilling out the basic good which our confusions conceal.

But without resistance there can be no impetus for such distillation. We think deeply only when life disputes our premises. Undisturbed truth is undisturbing. But doubts must be intelligently resolved.

Men could associate evil events with the will of God until Habakkuk speculated as to what that must do to the divine character. Or they could relate suffering to sin and prosperity to righteousness until Job found in adversity the sure confidence of his Lord. Then they must re-interpret life in terms of more personal responsibilities. We can lose our souls, not *in spite of* what we believe, but *because* we believe it.

Prior to 1939 Czechoslovakia believed implicitly in the power of her mechanized army, and France was proud of her Maginot Line. Little did Czechoslovakia know then that her troops would soon yield spiritlessly to Hitler's marching hordes, while France never expected to surrender the Maginot Line without a shot.

Our philosophy must be higher than convention and nobler than custom if we would remain spiritually free. Thus, it must represent far more than the attempt, as Arnold Toynbee has indicated, to live upon the accumulated spiritual assets of our fathers. The product of life, it must come alive.

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This means that our philosophy must possess a moral stamina surmounting both the resistance of evil people and the evil conservatism of timid good people. So it must inspire a consistency of faith which declares its insights in unadulterated terms and refuses to pander its visions to popularity. In effect, it must warrant our sharing the sublime eulogy which someone once uttered concerning Theodore Roosevelt: "He gathered around himself an enviable circle of friends and an equally enviable circle of enemies."

There was a time when Christians greeted one another with the thrilling salutation: "God's peace be with you!" Early Methodists locked grips in a warm handclasp as they earnestly inquired: "Is it well with thy soul?" Behind both experiences stood the conviction that man was made for God and must not be permitted to compromise his Sovereign. The Church found its sole justification in regenerated lives and displayed such courage in regenerating them that its fiercest foes were frequently numbered among its converts.

The case of Benjamin Abbott might be cited a thousand times over among the rough apostles who tempered the American wilderness to the winds of salvation. On his way to preach at Deerfield, New Jersey, Abbott was warned by a friend that a mob had assembled to tar and feather any itinerant who dared to come there.

"At first," he says, "I thought I would return; consulting with flesh and blood, I concluded that it would be a disagreeable thing to have my clothes spoiled, and my hair all matted together with tar." But he recalled the sufferings of his Lord, and immediately "resolved to go and preach if he had to die for it."⁷

And preach he did, with such "liberty" that

"... before the meeting was over I saw many tears drop from their eyes, and the head of the mob said that 'he had never heard such preaching since Robert Williams went

⁷ Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, Volume I (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1866), pp. 251-252.

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away;' so I came off clear. Glory be to God, who stood by me in this trying hour!"⁸

As we read the testimonies of such committed persons, we cannot dispute the fact that these men knew what they believed and why they believed it. Neither did they hesitate to let the world know exactly where they stood and why they stood there. Whatever else they may have lacked, they had a great God, a great gospel, and a great goal. And if at times their figures of speech fall strangely upon our ears, perhaps the reason we find them alien lies in the fact that they were expressing a spiritual experience which is now foreign to many of us. Few of us understand Einstein's vocabulary. That is not to say that there is anything wrong with his vocabulary. It is rather to emphasize the fact that we do not share Einstein's experience.

When Father Damien, ministering to the lepers of Molokai, spilled scalding water upon his flesh and felt no pain, he knew that he had fallen victim to leprosy. If we can stand in the presence of men and women who are ignorant of the gospel, who have no passion for the transforming grace of Christ, who sense no wrong in their indifference to spiritual things, who violate the moral code with no qualms of conscience, and who, like Simon of Samaria, naïvely expect that their occasional contributions will buy them the power of God—if we can stand in the presence of these and feel no agony in our souls, we have become spiritual lepers.

Only beliefs that do not matter remain silent before sacrilege. A significant faith, so confronted, must set up titanic tensions in our lives. It must drive us back again and again to the foot of the Master's cross to test our truth by his.

Nor can we withhold the truth because men protest. Dr. Jenner vaccinates a sick child despite a storm of popular protest to save a people from smallpox. Let men object to the gospel we preach! The more vigorously they object, the more deeply they must think upon it; and, once it has infiltrated their thinking, they can never again escape it!

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 252

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George W. Crabbe tells us that early in the present century Senator Jonathan P. Dolliver gave a dinner party to a number of prominent Washingtonians. His distinguished guests included senators, representatives, judges, cabinet members, and foreign diplomats. Also present was the senator's aged father, a retired minister. In the course of the evening, the senator noticed that the old man had engaged one of the most outstanding of the diplomats in an intensely earnest conversation; and, drawing near, he heard his father say, "My brother, how is it with your soul?" Feeling that this was neither the time nor the place for such a question, the senator edged between the two; and his father quietly withdrew from the room.

A short while afterward, the old gentleman died. As might be expected, there were many beautiful and expensive floral tributes sent to the funeral. But one far surpassed all the rest. Moving close to examine it, the senator saw that it bore a card signed by the celebrated diplomat. On it was this inscription: "To The Man Who Cared For My Soul." ⁹

IV.

Here, in essence, is the basic meaning of the last beatitude. The power within us will more than counterbalance the power outside us if we care enough to release it regardless of possible consequences. Whatever happens, we must remember that our spiritual force cannot be destroyed unless we ourselves destroy it.

"... the place may easily be taken," said Alexander to Oxyartes as they surveyed the virtually inaccessible rock where Sisimithres was entrenched, "since what is in command of it is weak." ¹⁰ Paul, a prisoner in chains bound for trial before Caesar, safely carried his captors through a terrifying northeaster at sea by no other power than his faith in God and his love of men (Acts 27). Confi-

⁹ *Some Stories and Incidents Used in Thirty-Eight Years Experience on the Platform as a Worker in the Anti-Saloon League*, Privately Published, p. 18. (Used by permission.)

¹⁰ Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, Translated by John Dryden and Revised by Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: The Modern Library), p. 842.

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dence is always born of conviction; and courage is the natural evidence of firm, spiritual moorings.

This is what Jesus meant when he told his disciples to be grateful for opposition. It drives us back to fundamentals, compelling us to test every belief in terms of the experiences it produces, sloughing off those which are outgrown, becoming increasingly receptive to those for which we have been consistently preparing, drawing forth a strength which others must help us to tap merely because they need us.

Where we might give up alone, we will persevere when we realize that the hopes of men and the purposes of God depend upon our integrity to high ideals. Regarding selfish concerns we can cynically declare, "What's the use?" But we cannot say that of other men's lives or of God's design. So we press on beyond our known strength until we attain to a redemptive truth which eventually becomes incarnate in us.

Jesus knew that such spiritual development cannot be reached apart from conflict. Just as white-hot iron, tempered in flame, takes useful shape beneath the skillful blows of the smith's mallet, so our thinking, tempered in the fiery discovery of truth, must ultimately bend our will to the ongoing purposes of God. Before that consecration all bondage must cease, all fetters fall.